

MASTER'S THESIS

Cantonese syntactic construction involving patient fronting

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**CANTONESE SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTION
INVOLVING PATIENT FRONTING**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an analysis of the interaction of discourse - pragmatics with syntax in spoken Cantonese. The study investigates how discourse-pragmatics functions affect syntax, focusing on the conditions for patient - fronting.

The following four Cantonese syntactic structures are studied:

1. NPI - Agent + Verb + NP2 - Patient
(AVP construction)

2. NP1 -Agent + jēung + NP2 -Patient + Verb
(jēung construction)

3. NP2- Patient + béi + NP1 - Agent + Verb
(béi construction)

4. NP - Patient + Verb
(PV construction)

(NP : noun phrase, jēung : pre-transitive marker, béi : passive marker)

The basic characteristics of these constructions are analyzed. Their relative frequency in the corpus are stated, and some basic properties of the agents and patients are investigated.

It will be shown that these four sentence constructions are some of the focusing devices which Cantonese speaker can use to deviate from the SVO order freely as they organize their information focus according to the degree of its importance. Discourse - pragmatic factors do play an important role in the use of the patient - fronting structure. They are crucial in deciding where to front a patient, and also in choosing one patient-

fronting construction over another. For instance, the use of Jēung is associated with dynamic situations and clauses; the Béi construction promotes its patient to the sentence-initial position and hence topicalizes the patient and frees up the focus position at the same time; the Patient-Verb construction is associated with contrastive and listing function and static functions.