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TRANSITIVITY IN CANTONESE

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By

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FOR MY LORD AND MY BEST FRIEND JESUS CHRIST
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This dissertation studies the notion of transitivity in Cantonese. Conventionally, transitivity is defined in terms of subject and object. If a sentence has both subject and object, it is transitive. If a sentence only has a subject, then the sentence is intransitive. This way of defining transitivity may seem useful in many languages. However, it does not work very well in Chinese languages. Chinese languages are well known for lacking case marking and agreement. Therefore, subjects and objects are defined solely on the basis of word order. Being SVO in nature, when there is an NP following the main verb, the NP can be considered to be the object, and the sentence is transitive. Yet this way of defining transitivity encounters problems, especially when some verbs, such as heui ‘to go’ or fan ‘to sleep’ in Cantonese, which do not require any object semantically, are followed by an object-like NP. The analyses given for these verbs vary from linguist to linguist. Some linguists argue that they are transitive, whereas others suggest the opposite.

This dissertation argues that the best way to determine transitivity is by applying syntactic tests to problematic constructions. Using Cantonese as the primary data, this dissertation reexamines eight problematic constructions that can be argued as being either transitive or intransitive. Various syntactic tests will be employed, and conclusions are drawn based on the results of these tests.
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Chapter 1

Introduction to Transitivity

1.1 Background

One of the most central issues in grammatical studies is the notion of transitivity. No one who analyzes sentences and does syntactic typology can avoid using terms like transitive verbs, intransitivity, ditransitive predicates, etc. The basic assumption is that languages, be they spoken in Europe, in Asia, or in the Middle East, have a set of verbs that require only one argument, while others may require more than one argument. Therefore, generalizations can be made according to the number of required argument(s) in a sentence.

A required argument, plainly speaking, is the argument that must appear in a sentence along with the main verb. The absence of such an argument would cause the sentence to become ungrammatical. For instance,

(1) a. John ran (to the store).
   b. *ran (to the store).

In (1a), ‘John’ is a required argument of the verb run, because the absence of it (as in 1b) makes the sentence ungrammatical. However, the store is not a required argument. The presence or the absence of it does not affect the grammaticality of the sentence.
The notion of transitivity has long been discussed by various linguists (for instance, Robins 1964; Hartman and Stork 1972; Lakoff 1977; Hopper and Thompson 1980; Givón 1985; Tsunoda 1985, 1994, 1999). In recent years, there are basically two main viewpoints on transitivity: a schematic approach and a prototypical approach. From the schematic or the conventional point of view, a verb that requires two arguments is transitive. In the most typical situation, one of the arguments is always an agent-like argument, which is manifested as the subject of the transitive sentence. The other one is a theme-like argument, which appears in the object position of the sentence, as in (2a). The action denoted in the sentence abstractly ‘transfers’ from the agent-like argument to the theme-like argument. In contrast, a verb that requires only one argument is intransitive, and no activity is transferred. The argument in an intransitive clause may show a variety of thematic roles (2b-d). A relatively small number of verbs, moreover, may require three arguments (2e-f).

(2) a. John kicked the ball. [John - Agent; The ball - Theme]
b. John runs. [John - Agent]
c. John sleeps. [John - Theme]
d. John knows. [John - Experiencer]
e. John shows me the ball. [John - Agent; Me - Goal; The ball - Theme]
f. Mary gave some food to him. [Mary - Agent; Some food - Theme; Him - Goal]
The other way to look at transitivity is from a prototypical point of view, which is best represented by Hopper and Thompson (1980). In this approach, a list of semantic properties associated with the notion of transitivity is compiled. Verbs that express more of these properties have a higher degree of transitivity than those that show fewer of these properties. More will be said about these two viewpoints in Chapter three.

1.2 SOME PROBLEMS WITH TRANSITIVITY

The notion of transitivity was first developed and used in western linguistic literature, and it was a convenient way to describe sentences along with other terms like subject and object (Tsunoda 1994). However, it is not free of problems. As mentioned above, in the most typical case of a transitive sentence, one of the arguments is an agent-like argument, and the other one is a theme argument. However, there are probably more non-typical transitive types than the typical ones. The ‘transitive’ label is often extended to sentences that lack a clear-cut agent-like argument. For example:

(3) a. He owns a bicycle.
    b. She remembers me.

In the sentences above, the subjects are clearly not acting upon their respective objects. One may argue that remembering something requires a mental action. Even if this is right, (3b) is still far from being a typical transitive sentence because the object does not receive any ‘transfer’ of action. Sentences like these, interestingly, are often expressed as intransitive sentences in languages other than English. For example ((4b) adopted from Wataru, 1999):
(4) a. *Regular transitive sentence*

\[
\text{John-ga biiru-o non-da.} \\
\text{John-NOM beer-ACC drink-PST} \\
\text{‘John drank beer.’}
\]

b. *Verb of possession*

\[
\text{John-ni musuko-ga i-ta.} \\
\text{John-DAT son-NOM exist-PST} \\
\text{‘John had a son.’}
\]

As we can see from Japanese, when there is a transfer of action from the subject to the object, the case marking is nominative-accusative (4a). But when there is no transfer of action, like owning a son, the case marking in Japanese becomes dative-nominative (4b).

Another problem with transitivity is its relationship to passivization. Passivization is often considered to be one of the tests for transitive sentences (Tsunoda 1994). A typical passive sentence should follow the universals of passivization formulated by Perlmutter and Postal (1983: 9):

(I) A direct object of a transitive clause is the (superficial) subject of the ‘corresponding’ passive.

(II) The subject of an active clause is neither the (superficial) subject nor the (superficial) direct object of the ‘corresponding’ passive.

The subject of the active sentence is turned into an oblique noun phrase, or often it is ‘unspecified’. Most transitive sentences comply with these universals, as in (5a-d).
(5) a. John hit the boy
   b. The boy was hit (by John).
   c. I opened the door.
   d. The door was opened (by me).

However, not all sentences that require two arguments (transitive) can have corresponding passive sentences.

(6) a. He had three big houses.
   b. *Three big houses were had (by him).
   c. This situation constituted a problem
   d. *A problem was constituted (by this situation).

What is more interesting is that some apparent intransitive sentences can have a corresponding passive clause:

(7) a. The detective carefully looked into the case.
   b. The case was carefully looked into (by the detective).
   c. The teacher goes over the test.
   d. The test is gone over (by the teacher).

These examples clearly show that the issue of transitivity is not as straightforward as one may expect, and the same kinds of problems are not limited to English.
Furthermore, when the notion of transitivity was carried into non-Western languages, which displayed very different mappings of grammatical relations, transitivity becomes even harder to define. According to Tsunoda, the study of ergativity was a partial catalyst to the challenge of the conventional definition of transitivity (1999: 2) because linguists were forced to rethink what subjects and objects were in ergative languages. Since Dixon (1972), linguists have devoted much effort to the study of ergativity. However, there is a fundamental problem when transitivity is integrated with ergativity (Gibson & Starosta 1990). The main problem is not to distinguish the agent from a theme in a sentence, but it involves the question of ‘how to recognize a transitive clause’ (Gibson & Starosta 1990: 197). As Gibson and Starosta point out, a language may exhibit two or more different two-argument patterns in which the case markings on the noun phrases are entirely different. Linguists then have to painfully choose one of these patterns as the ‘basic’ transitive pattern, and utilize it to compare with the intransitive counterpart. The choice of using one or the other greatly affects the conclusion of whether a language is accusative or ergative.

In the Chinese linguistic literature (Chao 1948; Li & Thompson 1981; etc.), the notion of transitivity has always been taken for granted. Since Chinese, an SVO language, in general has no overt case marking system or agreement system, Chinese linguists often label a verb with a noun phrase following it transitive. Therefore, classic transitive verbs like ‘hit’ and ‘kill’ are also considered to be transitive verbs in Mandarin. For example:
In languages like Mandarin, transitivity is conventionally determined purely on word order. If there is no element between the verb and the object-like noun phrase in a sentence, it is often considered as transitive. However, this criterion runs into some problems, because some verbs which semantically are not expected to allow a direct object (i.e. intransitive) can also be considered as transitive in Mandarin by this criterion.

(9) a. 那地方死了人。
    Na difang si-le ren.
    That place die-PFT person
    ‘Someone died at that place.’ (Lit. That place died a person.)

b. 他去了美国。
    Ta qu-le meiguo.
    3rd SG go-PFT America
    ‘S/he went to America.’ (Lit. S/he went America.)

Although the meaning of neither si ‘die’ and qu ‘go’ implies the presence of a second argument, (9a) and (9b) might be considered as transitive simply because they have a noun phrase directly following them. However, this situation is typologically odd. The
lack of a formal and explicit notion of transitivity in Chinese in general makes it very
difficult for Chinese linguists to use the notion correctly.

1.3 SOME ISSUES IN THIS DISSERTATION

1.3.1 THE GOAL OF THIS STUDY

The goal of this dissertation is to revisit the notion of transitivity in Cantonese. In
the process, transitivity will be studied based on syntactic criteria. Some syntactic tests,
which can be used to distinguish direct objects from oblique noun phrases, will be
applied to Cantonese sentences. It is hoped that some problematic sentences like (9a) and
(9b) can be resolved. It is important to note that this way of studying the notion may be
different from other linguists’ conception.

This study will draw data primarily from Cantonese. Since very few works have
been devoted to the study of transitivity in Cantonese (Cheung 1972) (as well as in
Mandarin), the researcher hopes that this study can make a contribution to this area of
syntactic analysis. It is also hoped that this study of the notion of transitivity can shed
some light on the analyses of other constructions such as the bēi construction, the jēung-
construction (the counterpart of the ba-construction in Mandarin), VO compounds, and
the coverb construction.

1.3.2 METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCE

Since a writing system has not been fully developed and used in formal writing,
there is no written record of how speakers actually use Cantonese. Therefore, it is almost
impossible to get Cantonese data from text materials. Data will therefore be made up
primarily by the researcher, who is a native speaker of Cantonese. The data will be
confirmed by other native speakers of Cantonese to avoid any biased grammatical judgments. When appropriate text materials are found (informal writing in popular magazines, etc.), they will also be incorporated and analyzed with respect to syntactic transitivity.

1.4 Theoretical Orientation

Since this dissertation is a preliminary descriptive study of transitivity in Cantonese, the researcher has decided not to tie himself to a particular syntactic framework. However, it is almost impossible, if not entirely impossible, to explain any syntactic phenomena without using some familiar terminology, and even the use of basic terms like 'subject' and 'object' imply one's belief in some syntactic orientation. The researcher, therefore, chooses to use the simplest labels available to describe the data in Cantonese. This dissertation will begin the investigation by using terminology from the Basic Linguistic Theory, which was developed by Dixon (1972, 1979, 1994), as the basis of the analysis. When applicable, other theories or frameworks will be used to explain the facts found in the data.

1.4.1 The Theory

In early versions of the Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 1972, 1979, 1994), Dixon proposes three universal primitives of argument relations: S, A, and O. These arguments are taken to be core arguments in every possible sentence, and they must be present, or at least retrievable from the context in order to form grammatical sentences. Whether the arguments of a sentence should be considered to be core arguments depends on the semantic information and syntactic facts of the predicate. Core arguments, which are
different from non-core or peripheral arguments, are required arguments that the predicate of a sentence must have. Peripheral arguments, in contrast, are not required by the semantics of the predicate. Their presence may simply add on extra information about the action or the event denoted in the sentence.

According to the theory, the label S is given to the single required core argument in a simple one-argument sentence, as in the following examples.

(10)a. John left
b. Cantonese
    個    喊緊.
    Kéuih haam-gân.
    3RD SG cry-PROG
    'S/he is crying.'

In both of the above examples, the bold-faced nouns would be labeled S according to the Basic Linguistic Theory. It is defined syntactically. In a typical simple sentence with more than one core argument, the label A is typically given to the core argument which initiates or controls the action or the event, or the one which contributes the most to the success of the activity. The O relation is used for the core argument which is the most affected by the activity. Examples are as follow:

(11)a. John hit Mary.
b. Cantonese

你 放 唔！
Leih fong-jó kéuih!
2SG release-PST 3SG
‘You released him/her!’

The nouns John in English and léih in Cantonese are both labeled A, since they both initiate and contribute the most to the activities. Mary and kéuih are both O because they are affected the most by the activities. As these examples show, distinguishing A from O requires the use of semantics.

In the latest version of the Basic Linguistic Theory, Dixon and Aikenvald (2000) argue that it is necessary to add another argument, which they label E. Although E is also a required argument, it generally appears with a dative marker, unlike the other three relations. Typically, the beneficiary or the recipient argument takes this relation. A good example in English is the verb dash.

(12)a. John dashed to the door.

b. *John dashed.

The examples illustrate that the verb dash requires an extra argument, which is accompanied by the preposition to. Omitting it would make the sentence ungrammatical, as in (12b). So the door, though it appears with a locative marker, is required by the verb, and it would be labeled as the E argument of the verb dash.

The notion of E argument is very important in the study of transitivity because it shows the difference between valency and the transitivity of a predicate. The valency of
a predicate is determined by the number of required arguments it takes based on its semantics. Some predicates require one argument semantically (monovalent). Some need two (bivalent). A small number of predicates need three core arguments (trivalent). Transitivity, on the other hand, is determined by the number of required arguments a predicate takes based on morphological and syntactic information. It has to do with whether the core arguments are S, A, or O. In general, valency and transitivity match each other. That is, in most cases, the number of semantically determined core arguments of a predicate is also manifested in transitivity. *Bite* and *cut* are good examples.

(13)a. bite: <N, N> ← semantically required arguments
    The dog bit me.

    b. cut: <N, N>
    He cut the cable.

Both *bite* and *cut* are bivalent, and they are also transitive (appear with two syntactically required arguments - an A and an O). Yet there are also examples where a bivalent predicate is intransitive, or A trivalent predicate is transitive (rather than ditransitive).

(14)a. look: <N, N>
    John looked at Mary
    *John looked Mary.

    b. show: <N, N, N>
    He showed a book to me.

From the semantics of *look* (14a), we can see that it requires two arguments: the entity which does the looking and the entity that is looked at. But one of the required
arguments is marked with ‘at’, which makes the sentence intransitive. A similar situation happens to show (14b) also. Show requires three arguments: the entity which does the showing, the entity which is shown, and the entity to which something is shown. Syntactically, (14b) is transitive because it has only two required core arguments. The third argument is marked by the preposition to. From the discussion so far, we can conclude that an intransitive predicate can be either S or S and E. A transitive sentence can be A and O, or A, O and E.

The discussion of S, A, O and E so far has led us to a practical question: if a sentence has two required NPs, how exactly can one know if they are A and O, or S and E? This question seems to be even more problematic if the language being studied has case marking for all NPs (e.g. Japanese, Korean, etc.) To address this question, I will present here the idea put forth by Kiparsky (1987), and later adopted by O’Grady (1996) that S, A, and O (in O’Grady’s terms: subjects and direct objects) are grammatically linked to the verb by word order or inflectional morphology rather than by an adposition or other elements with an independent meaning. Other arguments are not linked this way. In other words, S, A, and O can be either bare nominals (no overt morphological marking) or they can be morphologically marked by elements that are primarily used to indicate the grammatical relations of these NPs. E, however, is always marked by an element that has its own independent meaning in other contexts. The following sentence in Japanese can illustrate this distinction.
As shown in the examples, both *ga* and *o* are used to indicate the relationship of the two core arguments, and they are semantically empty elements. *Ni*, on the other hand, has an independent meaning, which is to mark a location or a direction, and it is also used to mark the E argument (Mary) in (15a).

One may also argue that *ga* in Japanese may mark other arguments other than A or S, and the extended use of this core argument marker is often found in many languages. A good example in Japanese is this:

John-DAT English-NOM understand-NONPST
‘John understands English.’

It seems that case marking, among other things, is not by itself a good indication of these grammatical relations.

The argument above is taken to be a challenge to the conventional way of looking at transitivity. That is, it is not sufficient to label something as transitive or intransitive simply based on case marking, word order, and/or agreement alone. There must be some other reliable ways to study transitivity. This position is taken very seriously in this
dissertation. In fact, it is argued strongly here that transitivity should be studied from both syntactic and semantic perspectives.

1.4.2 SYNTACTIC TRANSIVITY

In studying syntactic transitivity, syntactic tests will be employed to determine the transitivity of a sentence. There are syntactic tests that can show differences in behavior between the O argument and an oblique noun phrase. Three of the tests to be used in this dissertation will be the saai particle test, the màaih test and relativization.

1.4.2.1 TEST 1: THE SAAI PARTICLE TEST

The saai particle is a verbal particle that is peculiar to Cantonese. Its meaning is ‘all’ or ‘completely’, and the function of saai is to quantify either the S argument or the O argument. Here are two examples of the use of this particle:

17). a. *Transitive sentence*

Ili1!1 Ng6hdeih sihk saai di sihkmah.t.  
1ST PL eat all CL food.  
‘We ate all the food.’

b. *Intransitive sentence*

K6uihdeih k6i saai hai mûnhhâu.  
3RD PL stand all LOC entrance  
‘All of them are standing at the entrance.’

Example (17a) shows how the particle saai quantifies one of the arguments in the sentence. In this example, as suggested by the translation, the O argument sihkmah.t ‘food’ is quantified. Even though the A argument may also be a possible target for
quantification, the sentence cannot be interpreted as 'all of us ate food'. This example shows that *saai* does not quantify just any argument in a sentence. If it is a transitive sentence, it only quantifies the O argument. (17b) shows another example of *saai* and this time it is found in an intransitive sentence. There are two possible NPs in this sentence that may be quantified. But the interpretation of this sentence clearly points out that *saai* quantifies the S argument, *kēuihdeuih* 'they', not the locative NP *mǔnhhâu* 'entrance'. From these two examples, we can see that *saai* can quantify the S argument or the O argument. This property of *saai* will be very crucial in helping to determine the transitivity of the Cantonese verbs we will study.

1.4.2.2 TEST 2: THE MÀAIH TEST

The second test we will use in this dissertation is the *màaih* test. *Màaih*, which means 'in addition', 'along' or 'to bring certain ongoing actions to completion', is syntactically similar to *saai*. It modifies either the S argument or the O argument. Here are some examples of *màaih* (adopted from Matthews and Yip 1996 223-224, gloss modified):

18). a. *Transitive sentence*

我埋份報紙去睇。
Ngóh láh màaih fahn boují heuí tái.
1st SG take VPRT CL newspaper go read
'The S argument'
b. *Intransitive sentence*

連  Bill 都 撲 埋 -
Lihn Bill dōu láih màaih.  
Even Bill also come VPR
‘Even Bill came along.’

c. 你 幫 我 食 埋 呢 食物。
Léih bōng ngoḥ sihk màaih dī sihkmat.  
2ND SG for 1ST SG eat VPR CL food
‘You eat up the food for me.’

In (18a), the meaning of màaih ‘along’ is associated to the O argument of the transitive sentence. It does not modify the A argument of the sentence. In (18b), màaih has its meaning associated to the S argument of the sentence, Bill. So the meaning of the sentence is that in addition to many other people, Bill also came along. However, màaih fails to quantify the oblique NP, as shown in (18c). There are three possible NPs in (18c) that màaih may quantify: the A argument léih ‘you’, the O argument dī sihkmat ‘the food’ and the oblique NP ngoḥ ‘I’. But màaih only quantifies the O argument. It shows that màaih cannot quantify the A argument and the oblique NP. These sentences indicate that màaih can be used as a test to make a distinction between an O argument and an oblique NP.

1.4.2.3 Test 3: Relativization

Relativization can also help to distinguish a core argument from an oblique noun phrase. In some languages, the relative position is a gap if the core arguments are relativized. However, if an oblique noun phrase undergoes relativization, the relative position has a pronoun coreferring to the noun phrase being relativized on. This is true in Persian:

a. Relativizing the S argument

Mard-i [ke (*u) bolandqad bud] juje-rā košt
Man [that (*he) tall was] chicken-ACC killed
'The man that was tall killed the chicken.'

b. Relativizing the O argument

Hasan mard-i-rā [ke zan (u-rā) zad] mišenasad.
Hasan man-ACC [that woman (he-ACC) hit] knows
'Hasan knows the man that the woman hit.'

c. Relativizing the E argument

Man zan-i-rā [ke Hasan be u sibe zamini dād] mišenasam.
I woman-ACC [that Hasan to her potato gave I-know
'I know the woman to whom Hasan gave the potato.'

The examples show both the gap strategy and the pronoun strategy. When the S argument is relativized (19a), the gap strategy must be used. When the O argument is relativized, there is a choice of using both strategies. However, when the E argument is relativized, the language must use the pronoun strategy. It goes to show us that we can identify a NP as core or peripheral by means of its behavior in relativization. This test, along with the saai particle test and the màaih test, will be the basis for studying syntactic transitivity in this dissertation.

1.5 OVERVIEW

In the chapters to follow, we will first give a sketch of Cantonese in Chapter two. Then an overview of previous studies on transitivity will be provided in Chapter three. In Chapter four, we will apply some syntactic tests to Cantonese data. We will first focus
on three problematic constructions in Cantonese: the Verb of Motion construction (MV), the Locative Verb construction (LV) and the Verb with an adverbial object construction (AOV). In Chapter five, other constructions, namely the passive construction, the jeung construction, the VO compounds and the coverb construction will be tested. In Chapter six, we will focus our attention on the Ergative Verb construction. Finally, a conclusion will be given in Chapter 7.
Chapter 2

Sketch of Cantonese

2.1 General Background

Cantonese belongs to the Sinitic branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family (Lyovin, 1997: 128). Formally speaking, Cantonese is one of the languages of the Yue group. As of 1999, there were 71,000,000 speakers, who could be found all over Southern China, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines, Australia, and North America (Ethnologue). The Chinese speakers in North America are mostly Cantonese. Because of the fast growing economic development in the Canton area (currently known as Guangdong), many Chinese businessmen are learning Cantonese in order to do business with Hong Kong and related areas. The impact of Cantonese is not limited to the economy. It is the second most influential Chinese language (after Mandarin), probably because of the large number of films, TV programs, pop-cultural products, etc. produced in Cantonese every year (Matthews and Yip 1996).

Since Cantonese is usually considered to be one of the dialects of Chinese, it does not have a standardized written language of its own. Although more and more schools in Hong Kong choose to use Cantonese as a medium of education after China regained control of Hong Kong, standard written Chinese is still the only form that is taught and

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1 Most of the discussion here follows Matthews and Yip's discussion (1996).
learned in schools. In recent years, a written form of Cantonese has slowly emerged in subcultural genres like popular magazines, a small number of novels, subsections of newspapers, etc. However, the use of written Cantonese is still regarded as uneducated and colloquial, and to be avoided. Because of the complex relationship between spoken Cantonese and written Chinese, Cantonese speakers often believe that Cantonese has no grammar (personal communication). Cantonese grammar is never taught or mentioned in schools. This also sheds light on why not too many linguistic studies have been done on Cantonese. Most of the available linguistic literature reflects the grammar of Mandarin and the formal written language. The whole linguistic situation of Cantonese is comparable to Hawai‘i Creole Language, which is often spoken but is typically not used in formal writing.

2.2 PHONOLOGY

Like the other Chinese languages, Cantonese is a tone language, which means that a syllable may have different pitches in contrastive distribution. There are six distinctive tones, nineteen consonants and twenty-one vowels. Cantonese does not allow consonant clusters, and therefore the syllable structure is relatively simple: (C) V (V) (C). The following charts represent the consonants and vowels used in Cantonese (partially adopted from Matthews and Yip 1996: 34-20).
Table 2.1 Consonant chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unaspirated</th>
<th>Aspirated</th>
<th>Fricative</th>
<th>Nasal/Liquid</th>
<th>Glide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilabial</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>pʰ</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental/Alveolar</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>n/l</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velar/glottal</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>kʰ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>η</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labiovelar</td>
<td>kw</td>
<td>kwʰ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricate</td>
<td>ts</td>
<td>tsʰ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Monophthong vowel chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unrounded</th>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Rounded</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Back</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>i:</td>
<td>y:</td>
<td></td>
<td>u:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>θ</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td>e:</td>
<td>θ</td>
<td>a:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the consonants listed in the chart can be used in syllable-initial position. However, only six consonants can be used in syllable-final position: [m], [n], [ŋ], [p], [t] and [k]. Final stops are unreleased in Cantonese. The consonants [m] and [ŋ] are the only two that can serve as syllabic consonants. Examples in Cantonese include: [m] ‘not’, and [ŋ] ‘five’. There is no distinction between [n] and [l]. Speakers interchange them quite freely.

As for the vowels, there are ten monophthongs and ten diphthongs. The diphthongs are: [iː], [ɛː], [uː], [ɛj], [oː], [ow], [æj], [uw], [æj] and [aːw].
The tonal system in Cantonese is more complex than that of Mandarin. Mandarin is well known for having four distinct tones. But the exact number of tones in Cantonese depends on how one analyzes the data (Matthews and Yip 1996: 20). In this dissertation, we will follow the system suggested by Matthews and Yip. More discussion on the tones and the method of transcriptions can be found in Appendix A.

2.3 Syntax

In this section, we will discuss some basic syntactic facts about Cantonese.

2.3.1 Pronouns

The pronoun system in Cantonese is rather simple. There are three basic pronouns and three derived pronouns in Cantonese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal pronouns in Cantonese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pronouns in Cantonese are not inflected for gender, and plurality is expressed by adding the suffix -deih to the singular pronouns.

Cantonese pronouns are also not inflected for case. They can be used as the A/S argument, the O argument, the E argument, the possessor and the oblique NP. For example:
1).  a. *Kéuih as the S argument*

    「併走嘅。」
    Kéuih jáu-jó.
    3RD SG leave-PFT
    ‘S/he left.’

b. *Kéuih as the O argument*

    「阿John嘿併。」
    Ah-John láuh kéuih.
    John scold 3RD SG
    ‘John scolded him/her.’

c. *Kéuih as the E argument*

    「我介紹併Mary畀併。」
    Ngóh gáisiu-jó Mary bái kéuih.
    1ST SG introduce-PFT Mary to 3RD SG
    ‘I introduced Mary to him.’

d. *Kéuih as the possessor*

    「併嘅手好大。」
    Kéuih ge séu hóu daaih
    3RD SG POSS hand very big
    ‘His/her hand is very big.’

e. *Kéuih as the oblique NP*

    「我同併食飯。」
    Ngóh tūhng kéuih sīhk-gán-faahn.
    1ST SG with 3RD SG eat-PROG-rice
    ‘I am eating a meal with him/her.’

The third person singular pronoun *kéuih* can refer not only to animate entities, but to inanimates as well.
2). 嘱本書好靚喝。不如你買埋

Gó bún syū hóu leng wo. bátyuh léih máaih máaih
that CL book very pretty PRT why not 2nd SG buy VPRT

佢 洗?

kéuih lá?

3rd SG PRT

'That book is very pretty, why don’t you buy it as well.'

In (2), kéuih refers to gó bún syū ‘that book’ in the first clause.

2.3.2 THE NOUN PHRASE

Schematically, Cantonese noun phrases have the following pattern:

3). a. Demonstrative - numeral - classifier - adjective - possessive - noun

b. 呢 三 本 厚 眼 書。

Ni sāam bún háu ge syū.
this three CL thick poss book

‘These three thick books’

c. 嘱 兩 個 重 晃 盒。

Gó léuhng go chóng ge háap
that two CL heavy poss box

‘Those two heavy boxes’

2.3.2.1 DEFINITENESS

The definiteness of a noun phrase is not indicated by articles like a/an/the in English. One of the ways that indefiniteness can be indicated is to add the numeral yāi to the noun phrase.
4). 我 有 一 架 車。

Ngóh yáuh yāt ga chē.
1st SG have one CL car

‘I have a car.’

Without the numeral yāt ‘one’, definiteness is determined by the positioning of the noun phrase. If a noun phrase is used as the A or the S argument in a sentence, it is always interpreted as definite.

5). a. 架 車 壞咝。

Ga chē wái-jó.
CL car break-PFT

‘The/ *A car is broken’

b. 個 先生 鬧 我。

Go sǐnsâng láuh ngóh.
CL teacher scold 1st SG

‘The/ *A teacher scolded me.’

To make the A or the S argument indefinite, the verb yáuh ‘to have’ must be used before the noun phrase. Compare:

6). a. 有 (一) 架 車 壞咝。

Yáuh (yāt) ga chē wái-jó.
have (one) CL car break-PFT

‘There is a car broken.’

b. 有 (一) 個 先生 鬧 我。

Yáuh (yāt) go sǐnsâng láuh ngóh.
have (one) CL teacher scold 1st SG

‘There is a teacher scolding me.’
When the noun phrase is used in the O position, it can be interpreted as definite or indefinite (Matthews and Yip 1996: 89).

7). a. 我 買個 蛋糕。
   Ngôp máaih-jó go dahngôu.
   'I bought a/the cake.'

   b. 你 鬧個 先生 呀？
   Lêih láuh go sinsâng ah?
   'You scolded a/the teacher?'

The interpretation of definiteness is based on context for common nouns. If both the speaker and the hearer have previous knowledge of the reference, then the noun phrase is definite. But if the reference is new to both of them, the noun phrase is then interpreted as indefinite. Note also that yâuh 'to have' cannot be used with an O argument to indicate indefiniteness.

8). *我 買有 個 蛋糕
   Ngôp máaih-jó yâuh go dahngôu.
   'I bought a cake.'

2.3.2.2 DEMONSTRATIVES

Cantonese demonstratives nî 'this' and gô 'that' work similarly to their English counterparts. They have a deictic function, which is to point to a location or a referent close or far from the speaker. The use of demonstratives requires the presence of a classifier (see below) also.
A noun phrase with a demonstrative is automatically definite, regardless of the noun phrase's grammatical relation in a sentence.

Classifiers are one of the most important elements in a noun phrase. They may indicate the number, the shape, the function or the kind of noun. In English, one may say *a herd of sheep* or *a glass of water*. *Herd* and *glass* have a similar function to classifiers in Cantonese. The only difference is that most nouns in Cantonese are assigned to at least one classifier, whereas nouns in English are not required to be put into a class. According to Matthews and Yip, there are two basic types of classifiers (1996: 92):

(a) **Measure** or **mensural** classifier, which denote quantities of an item, such as .... the collective *bāan* referring to a group of people.

(b) **Type** or **sortal** classifier, which belong with the noun and classify it in terms of some intrinsic feature, e.g. *tiuh* denoting long, thin objects such as fish.

A noun accompanied by a classifier makes the noun specific. Without a classifier, a noun must be interpreted as generic. Compare:
10). a. 我 鐘意 棵 燈。
Ngôh jüngyi ján dăng
1st SG like CL lamp
'I like the/a lamp.'

b. 我 鐘意 有花 貨 燈。
Ngôh jüngyi yáuhfa ge dăng.
1st SG like flowery poss lamp
'I like flowery lamps.'

There are two categories of nouns that do not take (sortal) classifiers: (1) nouns that express time like yahšt ‘day’ or lihn ‘year’. (2) Abstract nouns such as jiyyáuh ‘freedom’:

11). 美國人 最 鐘意 講 自由 喜 拉。
Meihgwok yahn jeui jüngyi gông jiyyáuh ga la.
American people most like speak of freedom PRT PRT
'Americans love to talk about freedom.'

The only classifiers that can be used with abstract nouns are generic classifiers (jùng ‘kind’, leuih ‘genre, species’ and yeuhng ‘kind’).

Another very important function of classifiers is to act as a replacement for a noun.

In this, they are somewhat similar to the pronoun one in English.

12). a. 車 嬉講，我 最 鐘意 呢 架。
Chê láihgông, ngôh jeui jüngyi nî ga.
Car is concerned 1st SG most like this CL
'Speaking of cars, I like this one the most.'

b. 呀 個 點 賣 嘛?
Gó go dim maaih â?
that CL how sell PRT
'How much is that one?' (lit. How is that one sold?)
Classifiers also participate in possessive constructions, which we will discuss in the next section.

The last function of classifiers to be discussed here is that they are used to indicate plurality. Nouns in Cantonese are not inflected for number. The suffix -deih, which pluralizes pronouns, cannot be used with any other noun. One of the ways to pluralize a noun is to use the classifier dio.

13). a. 鰾 花 好 腳 嘛。
Di fā hōu leng wo.
cl flower very pretty prt
'The flowers are very pretty.'

b. 你啲 有 有 見過 啥 筆 呀?
Leihdeih yáuh móu gin-gwo di bāt a?
2nd pl have not see-exp cl pen prt
'Have you seen the pens?'

c. 呢度 鰾 水 好 深。
Nidouh di séui hōu sām.
Here cl water very deep
'The water here is very deep.'

Dio, besides expressing plurality, is also used for uncountable nouns (13c).

Another way to indicate plurality is to have a numeral higher than one precede the classifier and the noun.

14). a. 我 有 兩 支 筆。
Ngóh yáuh leung ji bāt.
1st sg have two cl pen
'I have two pens.'
2.3.2.3 **Modifiers**

Modifiers such as the possessor NP in possessive NPs, predicates (verbal and adjectival phrases) and relative clauses precede the noun they modify.

15). *Schematic view of noun modification*

a. Modifier - ge - noun

b. Modifier - (gó) - CL - noun

One type of modification is the possessive construction. Both ways are used to indicate possession in Cantonese:

16). a. *Possession with ge*

![ge]

My father

1st SG POSS father

b. *Possession with a classifier*

![classifier]

My father

1st SG this/that CL father
The most formal way to indicate possession is (a), which involves the use of the possessor marker ge. A more popular way is (b), where the classifier of the ‘possessed nominal’ serves as a linker.

Besides these two methods to indicate possessions, Cantonese has another way to mark possession -- possession without any linker.

c. Possession without any linker

我 爸爸
Ngóh bābhā
1st SG father
‘my father’

(c) is restricted in usage - only kinship terms and inalienably possessed objects can appear in this construction.

17). a. 我 屋企
Ngóh ūkkēi
1st SG house
‘my house/home’

b. 我 家人
Ngóh gāyāhn
1st SG family
‘my family’

c.* 我 袋
Ngóh dōi
1st SG bag
‘my bag’

d.* 我 花
Ngóh fā
1st SG flower
‘my flower’
Type (a) and type (b) are used far more frequently than type (c) to indicate possession.

In addition to marking possession, modifiers such as predicates (verbal and adjectival phrases) also make use of the schematic structure described in (15) (repeated here).

15). Schematic view of the possessive construction

a. Modifier - ge - noun

b. Modifier - (gō) - CL - noun

18). Predicates as modifiers

Verbal predicates as modifiers

a. 煮飯用具
   Jyū faahn ge yuhnggéui
   cook rice POSS equipment
   ‘The equipment for cooking meals’

b. 開門條鎖
   Hōi muhn gó tiuh sóiśih
   open door that CL key
   ‘The key for opening door’

Adjectival predicates as modifiers

c. 好靚屋
   Hōu leng ge ūk
   very pretty POSS house
   ‘The very pretty house’

d. 好味食物
   Hóuméi gó dih sihkmat
   tasty that CL food
   ‘Tasty food’
This set of data shows that both verb phrases (18a and b) and adjectival phrases (18 c and d) can serve as modifiers of nouns using either construction.

Relativization employs the same constructions as the possession constructions stated above. Both type (a) and type (b) can be used.

19). a. *Relative clause with ge*

\[
[REL (Gó dí) ngóh jeui júngyi] ge sikhmat běi
\]

佰食晒。
kéuih sihk saai.
3RD SG eat all
‘The food that I like the most was eaten up by him/her.

b. *Relative clause with a classifier*

\[
[REL Ngóh jeui júngyi] (gó) dí sikhmat běi
\]

佰食晒。
kéuih sihk saai.
3RD SG eat all
‘The food that I like the most was eaten up by him/her.

Both constructions have essentially the same meaning. The only difference between them is usage. As mentioned above, *ge* possession/modification is more formal than the classifier possession/modification, and therefore is less colloquial.
2.3.3 WORD ORDER

Cantonese resembles English in terms of word order (except for relative clauses), since it is primarily a SVO language. Cantonese word order is relatively rigid because grammatical relations are expressed solely by word order.

20). a. 佢 打 我。
   Kéuih dá ngóh.
   3<sup>RD</sup> SG hit 1<sup>ST</sup> SG
   ‘S/he hit me.’

   b. 我 打 佢。
   Ngóh dá kéuih.
   1<sup>ST</sup> SG hit 3<sup>RD</sup> SG
   ‘I hit him/her.’

There are quite a number of ways to promote elements within a sentence. One of them is by topicalization. Topicalization places an element central to the context of a sentence at the beginning of a sentence or a clause. This element can be one of the arguments within a sentence, or it can be a phrase describing a situation. For example:

21). a. 阿-John，我 嚴重 先 見到 啊
   Ah-John, ngóh ngāamngāam sīn gin-dōu a.
   John 1<sup>ST</sup> SG just now PRT see-VPRT PRT
   ‘John, I just saw him.’

   b. (在) 次 聚會，我 議嘅 好 多 新
   Gó či jéuiwúih, ngóh sik-jó hóu dō sān
   that CL meeting 1<sup>ST</sup> SG know-PFT very many new

   朋友。
   pahngyāuh.
   friend
   ‘(In) that meeting, I got to know many new friends.’
In (21a), the topic NP corresponds to the O argument of the verb *gin* ‘to see’. In (21b), however, the topic *gō chi jéuiwūih* ‘that meeting’ merely sets up a scene where the action in the sentence took place.

Besides this kind of topicalization, Cantonese also has ‘secondary topicalization’. Unlike the first type, where the topic is placed at the beginning of a sentence, secondary topicalization places an element after the A argument. For example (data adopted from Matthews and Yip 1996: 75)

22). a. 佢 香港 剩係 你 香港 MPS Hong Kong only know 九龍.
   Kéuih Héunggóng jihnghaih sik Gáulùng.
   3RD SG Hong Kong only know Kowloon
   ‘In Hong Kong s/he only knows Kowloon.’

   b. 佢 煮 飯 最 叻 係 蒸 魚。
   Kéuih jyú faahn jeui lèk haih jing yú.
   3RD SG cook food most clever COP steam fish
   ‘As far as cooking is concerned s/he’s best at steamed fish.’

Similar to the first type of topicalization, a secondary topic sets up a range or context for the action. The secondary topics in (22) are not related to the action directly, but have a whole-part relationship with the O argument.

In addition, some linguists claim that Cantonese has a VS order with certain types of intransitive verbs:
23). a. 今日 出現 一 個 問題。
Gamyaht chēutiyih-n jo yaht go mantái.
today appear-PFT one CL problem
'Today there appears a problem.'

b. 昨日 汝 大 雨 搞到 我 溼 晒。
Kāhmyaht lok dāaih yú gáau-dóu ngōh sāp saai.
Yesterday fall big rain cause-VPRT 1st SG wet all
‘Yesterday it rained so heavily that I became all wet.’

In both sentences the S arguments seem to appear after the verbs, which is why linguists call this a VS or inverted word order. This pattern is also known as the ergative verb construction, to which we will devote a chapter.

2.3.4 VERBS WITH UNDERSTOOD NP ARGUMENTS

Cantonese is a language that allows certain elements in a sentence to be dropped, as long as the context permits the hearer(s) to identity them. For instance:

24). A: 阿-John 買唔買 架 車 呀?
Ah-John máaih-müh-máaih ga chē aa?
John buy-not-buy CL car PRT
‘Will John buy the car?’

B: 唔 買 啦。有 錢 呀。
mh máaih la. móu chín aa.
NEG buy PRT no money PRT
‘(He) will not buy (it). (He) does not have any money.’

In the response B gives, the A argument John and the O argument ga chē ‘the car’ are not repeated. In the question A asks, the context of John’s wanting to buy the car is already set up. Therefore, it is considered to be unnecessary to repeat the same information again.
2.3.5 Clause Structure

Schematically, a simple verb phrase may contain the following elements.

25). a. NP (A) - (coverb/Prep. NP) - predicate - (VPRT) - (aspect) - NP (O) - (bei NP (E))

b. 我 嘚 屋企 寫 好信 封 信 界 信 阿 John。
Ngóh hái ükkéi sé hòu-jó fun seuung béi Ah-John.
1st SG at home write finish-PFT CL letter to John
‘I finished writing the letter to John at home.’

2.3.5.1 Coverbs/Prepositions

Cantonese has a class of words that are often translated into English as prepositions. But unlike prepositions in English, these elements occur before main verbs and can be used independently as verbs. Because of that, some linguists prefer to call them coverbs. The main ones are (data from Matthews and Yip 1996: 60):

26). 界 bei ‘to’ or ‘to give’
幫助 bong ‘for’ or ‘to help’
对 duei ‘to, towards’
跟 gän ‘with’ or ‘to follow’
經 ging ‘via’ or ‘itinerary’
嚎 hái, héung ‘at’ or ‘to be at’
向 heung ‘towards’ or ‘to face’
同 tühng ‘with’ or ‘to be together with’
為 waih ‘for the sake of’
用 wän ‘with’ or ‘to look for’
用 yuhng ‘with (instrumental)’ or ‘to use’

These elements are capable of taking certain aspect markers, and of being involved in V-not-V question formation. In this, they behave like regular verbs. For example:
27) a. *Regular verb with an aspect marker*

小明 買 繁 yeh.
Siu-ming maaih-gán yeh.
Siuming buy-PROG things
‘Siuming is buying things.’

b. *Regular verb in V-not-V question*

小明 買唔買 繁 yeh.
Siu-ming maaih-mh-maaih yeh.
Siuming buy-not-buy things
‘Does Siuming buy things?’

28). a. *Coverb with an aspect marker*

我 同緊 班 朋友 食飯。
Ngōh tühng-gán pāan pahngyáuh sihk-faahn.
1SG with-PROG CL friend eat-rice
‘I am eating a meal with my friends.’

b. *Coverb in V-not-V question*

你 用唔用 筷子 食 飯 呀?
Lēih yuhng-mh-yuhng fājī sihk faahn aa?
2SG use-not-use chopsticks eat rice PRT
‘Do you eat with chopsticks?’

In Chapter five we will use various tests to examine this construction.

2.3.5.2 Predicates

Cantonese has two main types of predicates: verbal and adjectival. Syntactically they behave very similarly. For example, both types of predicates can take aspect markers and verbal particles.
29). **Verbal predicate**

*With aspect markers*

a. 我吃 ular a meal (already).
   Ngôh sihk-jó faahn la.
   1st SG eat-PFT rice PRT

b. 佢 去過 Disney 三次。
   Kéuïh heui-gwo Disney sāam chi.
   3rd SG go-EXP Disney three time

*With verbal particles*

c. 我做 剩 好 多 咭。
   Ngôhdeih jouh jihng hóu dō yeh.
   1st PL do remain (VPRT) very many things

30) **Adjectival predicate**

*With aspect markers*

a. 你肥 好 多 吃。
   Lêih feih-jó hóu dō wo.
   2nd SG fat-PFT very much PRT
   ‘You have become a lot fatter (than before).’

b. 佢曾經 靚過 嘿！
   Kéuïh châhnggêng leng-gwo ga!
   3rd SG at one point pretty-EXP PRT
   ‘S/he used to be pretty at one point.’
With verbal particles

c. 阿约翰瘦剩棚骨昨。
   Ah-John sau jihng bahng gwät ja.
   John thin remain (VPRT) CL bone PRT
   ‘John is skinny to his bone.’

d. 你他想嘈死人咩。
   Léihdeih séung chóuh séi yàhn me.
   2nd PL want noisy dead people PRT
   Do you want to be noisy to death?’

Though verbal predicates and adjectival predicates are similar, there are two ways to separate them. First, adjectival predicates cannot take bare postpredicate arguments. For example:

31). a.* 你瘦吃佃。
      Léih sau-jó kéuih.
      2nd SG thin-PFT 3rd SG
      ‘You make him/her skinny.’ (Lit. ‘You skinny him/her.’)

   b.* 我靓吃你一啲。
      Ngôh leng-jó léih yát dì.
      1st SG pretty-PFT 2nd SG one bit
      ‘I make you pretty a bit.’ (Lit. ‘I pretty you a bit.’)

Second, adjectival predicates can be used in the comparative construction, but verbal predicates cannot.

32). a. 我高過你。
      Ngôh gōu gwo léih.
      1st SG tall over 2nd SG
      ‘I am taller than you.’
b. 佢 噪 過 問 飛機。
    Kéuih chóuh gwo dǐ féigéi.
    3SG noisy over CL airplane
    'S/he is noisier than airplanes.'

c.*我 跟 過 你 一 毛。
    Ngóh táí gwo léih yât dí.
    1SG see over 2SG one bit
    'I see more than you a bit.'

d.*Mary 食 過 我。
    Mary síhk gwo ngóh.
    Mary eat over 1SG
    'Mary eats more than me.'

2.3.5.3 TENSE/ASPECT

Cantonese does not have a system of tense. Thus, there are no notions such as present, past and future coded on predicates. However, the aspect system is quite extensive.

It is interesting to note that aspect markers are optional in Cantonese, as long as there are adverbial phrases that can give reference to the time. If the context is uninformative and no aspect markers are present, it is up to the hearer to decide on whether an action has taken place, is taking place, will take place, or takes place habitually. Although aspect markers are optional, in some syntactic contexts, the perfective aspect marker jó is strongly preferred. For instance, jó is called for when the verb has a quantified object and the time reference is past. Compare:
There are a total of six aspect markers in Cantonese. Their forms and primary functions are given here.

34). a. *With the perfective aspect jó (action completed)*

我 見咗 一 套 戲 啦。
Ngóh táj-jó gó tóu hei la.
1st SG watch-PFT that CL movie PRT
‘I have already seen that movie.’

b *With the experiential aspect gwo (action completed but the result no longer holds)*

我 去過 美國 啦。
Ngóh heui-gwo Méihgwok la.
1st SG go-EXP America PRT
‘I have been to America (and have come back).’

c *With the progressive aspect gán (dynamic ongoing activity)*

佢 跑緊 馬拉松。
Kéuih páu-gán Máláiíchòhng
3rd SG run-PROG Marathon
‘S/he is running in the Marathon.’
d. *With the continuous aspect jyu (a continuous state without change)*

我 想 永遠 抱住 你。

Ngôh seüng wîngyûng póu-jyu leîh.

1ˢᵗ SG want forever hold-CONT 2ⁿᵈ SG

‘I want to hold you forever.’

e. *With the delimitative aspect háh (without verb repetition: do for a while)*

媽， 你 過 視 下。

Mâ, léih gwo láih tái-hâh.

Mother 2ⁿᵈ SG cross come see-DEL

‘Mother, come take a look.’

f. *With the delimitative aspect háh (with verb repetition: repetition or prolongation of action)*

我 行行下 時 時候 發現 有 帶 錢

Ngôh hâng-hâng-hâh ge sihâh fâyîn mûâu dâi chin.

1ˢᵗ SG walk-walk-DEL POSS time discover not bring money

‘While I was walking, (I) discovered (I) didn’t bring any money.’

g. *With the habitual aspect hôi (a habitual, customary activity)*

佢 去開 個 醫生 時。

Kêuih heui-hôi gó go yîsâng ge.

3ʳᵈ SG go-HAB that CL doctor PRT

‘S/he always goes to that doctor.’

### 2.3.5.4 Verbal Particle

Cantonese has a large number of verbal particles that accompany predicates in sentences. According to Matthews and Yip (1996: 220-221), there are four main categories of verbal particles. The categories and some examples are given here.

The first type is the Directional Particle. The basic function of these verbal particles is to denote the direction of an action. They are somewhat similar to English
particles such as *look down, eat up*. These particles may also carry some metaphoric or figurative meanings.

35). *Directional particle (denotes the direction of an action)*

a. *fāan ‘return’*

```
尐 擺 返 問 金 界 我。
Kêuih lóh fāan dī chîn bêi ngôh.
3SG take return CL money to 1ST SG
'S/he returned some money to me.'
```

b. *dāi ‘down’*

```
請 你 寫 低 你 個 地址 界 我。
Chêng léih sé dāi léih go diêhjî bêî ngôh.
please 2SG write down 2SG CL address to 1ST SG
'Please write down your address for me.'
```

c. *chēut ‘out’*

```
你 點 可以 麻 得 出 個 答案 啥?
Léih dîm hóyîh lâm dâk chēut go dapngon ga?
2SG how can think able out CL answer PRT
'How can you think up the answer?'
```

The second type of verbal particles consists of Resultative Particles. They are often used with transitive verbs 'to indicate an effect on the object (O argument), and they form compounds with the verb[s]' (Matthews and Yip 1996: 217). Like the directional particles, resultative particles are used both literally and figuratively. Here are some examples.
36). a. *yuhn* ‘finish’

(My) elder brother went out after finishing eating.

b. *dou* ‘accomplishment or successful completion of an action’

I found the wallet.

c. *sei* ‘to death (figuratively)’

People are bored to death by the lecture.

The third type of verbal particles consists of quantifying particles. Syntactically this type of verbal particle is the same as the first two types, but semantically they quantify the S argument of an intransitive verb or the O argument of a transitive verb.

37). *saai* ‘all, completely’

a. Quantifying an S argument

The people all came.
b. *Quantifying the O argument*

\[\text{Di yåhn sihk saai dì sihkmat.}\]

'The people ate all the food.'

* 'All the people ate the food.'

38). *Màaih 'along, in addition'*

a. *Quantifying the S argument*

\[\text{Linh Ah-Bill dòu jåu màaih.}\]

'Even Bill left (along with others).'

b. *Quantifying the O argument*

\[\text{Ngôh màaih màaih tìngyált dì sung la.}\]

'I even bought tomorrow's food (in addition to today's food).'</n

These two particles will be very important in this dissertation (see Chapter 4-6).

The last type of verbal particle has only one member: *chān*, which carries an adversative/habitual meaning. When used with the adversative meaning, it means 'to one’s disadvantage/misfortune' (Matthews and Yip 1996: 227). It also modifies the S argument and the O argument, just as *saai* and *màaih* do.
39). *chān* `adversative meaning`

a. *Modifying the S argument*

我 幾乎 辣 親。

Ngóh gēifūh lat chān.
1ST SG almost burn VPRT

‘I almost got burned.’

b. *Modifying the O argument*

佢 有 有 嚇 親 你 呀？

Kéuih yáuh mòu haak chān léih aa?
3RD SG have not scare VPRT 2ND SG PRT

‘Did s/he scare you?’

When *chān* is used with the habitual meaning, it means ‘whenever’ and is found in the first of two consecutive clauses.

40). a. 我 整 親 車，佢 都 要 朶 賦。

Ngóh jihng chān chē, kéuih dòu ŭ̀u láih tái.
1ST SG fix VPRT car 3RD SG also need come see

‘Whenever I fix cars, s/he always want to come and see.’

b. 爸爸 去 親 美國 都 會 買 份 禮物

Bāhbā heui chān Méihgwok dòu wūih máaih fàn láimát
Father go VPRT America also would buy CL present

畀 我。

bēi ngóh.
to 1ST SG

‘Whenever (my) father goes to America, (he) buys me a present.’
2.3.5.5 Passive

Passivization is one of the syntactic processes that can affect the valency of verb phrases. In Cantonese, the passive construction involves the passive marker *bei*. Here is an example:

41). a. Before passivization

> 前面狗咬我—擔。
> Jek gau ngau-jó ngóh yát daahm.
> CL dog bite-PFT 1SG SG one bite.
> ‘The dog bit me once.’

b. After passivization

> 我畀一隻狗咬—擔。
> Ngôh bei jek ĝau ngau-jó yát daahm.
> 1SG PASS CL dog bite-PFT one bite
> ‘I was bitten by the dog once.’

Passivization changes the grammatical relations within a sentence. The O argument in (41a) now becomes the S argument in the passive sentence, and the original actor/A argument is marked by the passive marker *bei* (41b). It is worth noting that the *bei* marked NP (the actor of the action) must be present in passive sentences. Dropping it would make them ungrammatical. This restriction is not found in Mandarin and many other languages in the world.
42). a. *Mandarin*

```
我 被 (他) 咬了 一口。
Wo běi (ta) yào-le yi kǒu.
1<sup>st</sup> SG pass 3<sup>rd</sup> SG bite-PST one mouth
```

‘I was bitten once (by him/her/it).’

b. I was hit (by a ball).

When the actor is unknown or generic, *yàhん* ‘people’ (for human) or *yeh* ‘things’ (non-human) must be substituted.

**2.3.5.6 SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTION (SVC)**

Cantonese is known for having a construction where two or more verbs are juxtaposed without any conjunction. Traditionally, linguists often recognize four different patterns of SVCs.

The first pattern has the following schematic structure:

43). a. NP<sub>1</sub> - V - (NP<sub>2</sub>) - V - (NP<sub>3</sub>)

b. 我 開 水 洗手。
Ngóh hōi séui sai sáu.
1<sup>st</sup> SG open water wash hand

‘I turned on the water to wash my hands.’

‘I turned on the water and washed my hands.’

c. 你 切 餃 煮飯。
Léih chít sung jyú faahn.
2<sup>nd</sup> SG cut food cook rice

‘You cut the food to cook a meal.’

‘You cut the food and cook a meal.’
The characteristics of this SVC is that $NP_1$ is shared by both $V_1$ and $V_2$ as their $A$ argument. $NP_2$ and $NP_3$ are $O$ arguments of $V_1$ and $V_2$ respectively. Li and Thompson (1973, 1981) argue that this SVC has two homophonous syntactic structures. If the sentence has a purposive reading, then $V_2$ is subordinate to $V_1$ (the first readings of 43b and 43c). If it has a consecutive (action in temporal order), simultaneous, or alternating meanings, then the VPs are in coordination (the second readings of 43b and 43c).

The second type is the Pivotal SVC, which is different from the first type because $NP_2$, which is the $O$ argument of $V_1$, must be the semantic $A$ argument of $V_2$. Hence, $V_1$ must be transitive in this construction. The structure looks like this:

\[ 44\). a. \text{NP}_1 - V - \text{NP}_2 - V_2 - (\text{NP}_3) \]

\[ \begin{align*}
  b. \text{我} & \quad \text{等} \quad \text{你} \quad \text{食飯}。 \\
  \text{Ngóh} & \quad \text{dáng} \quad \text{léih} \quad \text{sihk-faahn}. \\
  1^{st} \text{SG} & \quad \text{wait} \quad 2^{nd} \text{SG} \quad \text{eat rice} \\
  \text{I wait for you to eat.} & \\
\end{align*} \]

In (44), the $O$ argument of $dang$ ‘to wait’ is also the $A$ argument of $sihk$ ‘to eat’.

The third type is also known as the coverb construction, which was discussed in section 2.4.3.1 in this chapter.

The last type is the resultative construction, which has the following structure:

\[ 45). a. \text{NP}_1 - V - V - \text{NP}_2 \]

\[ \begin{align*}
  b. \text{佢} & \quad \text{打} \quad \text{死} \quad \text{人}。 \\
  \text{Kéuih} & \quad \text{dá} \quad \text{séi} \quad \text{yáhn}. \\
  3^{rd} \text{SG} & \quad \text{hit} \quad \text{dead person} \\
  \text{S/he strikes someone dead.} & \\
\end{align*} \]
This construction is taken to consist of a verb plus a resultative verbal particle in Matthews and Yip's analysis (see section 2.4.3.4).

2.4 Summary

In this chapter we briefly discussed some basic facts about the phonology, and the syntax of Cantonese. In the next chapter, we will review the literature that discusses the notion of transitivity.
Chapter 3

Previous Studies

3.1 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, we will revisit some previous studies on transitivity. It is necessary to look back and see how the notion of transitivity has been defined. There will be two main sections in this chapter. First, we will compare the schematic approach and the functional approach discussed in Western linguistic literature. Second, we will examine the writings of some Chinese linguists and see how they define transitivity. The results will shed some light on the kind(s) of approaches Chinese linguists normally use when they use the terms transitivity, transitive verb, etc.

3.2 DISCUSSIONS OF TRANSITIVITY IN WESTERN LINGUISTIC LITERATURE

As mentioned in Chapter one, there are basically two major approaches to the notion of transitivity. The more conventional way of describe transitivity is the schematic approach. This approach takes transitivity as more or less a black and white distinction. Sentences are either transitive or intransitive, depending on the number of arguments in a sentence. According to the Dictionary of Language and Linguistics, a transitive verb is simply defined as ‘a verb used with a direct object’ (Hartman and Stork, 1972). An intransitive verb, in contrast, is ‘a verb which makes complete sense on its own without an object’ (1972: 118). In other words, when a sentence has two arguments (a subject and an object) and the action denoted in the sentence is ‘transferred’ from the
subject to the object, it is a transitive sentence. On the other hand, when a sentence has only one argument (a subject with or without an oblique noun phrase), it is considered as intransitive.

(1) a. Mary hit her brother.
    b. John pushed the cart.
    c. Sue left.
    d. Larry ran to the store.
    e. Keri stepped on Michael.
    f. This situation constituted a problem

(1a) and (1b) are considered to be the most typical examples of transitive sentences. The subjects in these sentences (Mary and John respectively) act upon the objects (her brother and the cart) by hitting (1a) and pushing (1b) the objects. The objects are directly affected by the actions. (1c) and (1d) are intransitive because there is only one argument in each of these sentences, and the actions do not involve any ‘transfer’ at all. However, there are some other less clear-cut sentences where the traditional notion of transitivity is challenged. In (1e), for example, there is only one argument in the sentence (Keri), yet the action denotes a ‘transfer’ from the argument to the oblique noun phrase. In such a case, the sentence is still considered to be intransitive due to morphological factors. In contrast, there are two arguments in (1f), and based on that it is labeled transitive, but there is no transfer of action from the subject argument to the object. In fact, the object
(her mother) is not affected at all. Interestingly, sentences like (1f) in many languages other than English are often intransitive.

The more troubling fact is that (1e), an intransitive sentence, seems to be more transitive syntactically than (1f), a transitive sentence, because it is perfectly acceptable to passivize (1e), but (1f) does not have a passive counterpart.

2) a. *Passivizing (1e)*

   Michael was stepped on by Keri.

   b. *Passivizing (1f)*

   * A problem was constituted by this situation

As mentioned in Chapter one, passivization is a syntactic process that applies to transitive sentences. The fact that passivization can be applied to (1e) but does not apply to (1f) seems to contradict the traditional approach to categorizing transitive from intransitive sentences.

Because of the inadequacy and limitation of the traditional view on transitivity, Hopper and Thompson (1980) have suggested a rather different way to look at transitivity. In their groundbreaking work, transitivity is viewed with two main differences from the traditional approach:

(I). Transitivity can be greatly affected by semantic factors, which are distinguished from the morphosyntactic aspects of a language. The traditional approach differentiates transitive sentences from intransitive ones solely on the basis of morphological and syntactic information. Yet, data from various languages show that semantic properties
play an important role in determining the transitivity of sentences. Hence comes the term semantic transitivity.

(II). Hopper and Thompson maintain that semantic transitivity is not a black-and-white phenomenon. Instead, it should be viewed as a continuum, where a large number of constructions fall between the most extreme ends on the continuum. Therefore, sentences can be high or low in transitivity.

These new suggestions are very crucial to the study of transitivity because they show that transitivity is more than just the coding on the noun phrases. In fact, according to their findings, the presence or absence of an object is only one of the ten components in this approach. The semantic properties of a language must therefore be carefully studied in order to account for the use of certain constructions.

Based on an extensive study of many languages, Hopper and Thompson have come up with a scale of transitivity that contains ten semantic parameters. These parameters are listed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Parameters of semantic transitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more participants, A and O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Kinesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-action</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Aspect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atelic</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Punctuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-punctual</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Volitionality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volitional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-volitional</td>
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<td>F. Affirmation</td>
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<td>Affirmative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Mode</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A high in potency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A low in potency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Affectedness of O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O totally affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O not affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Individuation of O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O highly individuated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O non-individuated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When sentences are compared against these parameters, the ones that show positive attributes are more likely to be high in semantic transitivity than the ones that are correlated to negative attributes of these parameters. In turn, a verb with high semantic transitivity, according to their study, is more likely to be transitive morphologically and/or syntactically than a semantically low transitive verb (negative attributes of the parameters). The correlation between the semantic parameters and the morphosyntactic marking on the noun phrases can be formulated into the Transitivity Hypothesis (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 255):

If two clauses (a) and (b) in a language differ in that (a) is higher in transitivity according to any of the feature A-J, then, if a concomitant grammatical or semantic difference appears elsewhere in the clause, that difference will also show (a) to be higher in Transitivity.

This means that if a language makes a distinction in transitivity based on any of the semantic criteria, a verb with low semantic transitivity is more likely to mark its theme-like argument with an oblique marker, so the sentence is intransitive morphologically. Interestingly, Japanese has such a distinction based on the degree of affectedness the object receives from the action (parameter I) (Nakamura, 1999):

3). a. John-ga yama-ni nobot-ta
   John-NOM mountain-DAT climb-PST
   ‘John climbed a mountain.’
   John-NOM mountain-ACC climb-PST
   ‘John climbed a mountain.’

The only difference between (3a) and (3b) is the case marking on the object. (3a) has the dative marking and (3b) has the accusative marking. From the translations it is hard to see how the sentences differ from one another. Yet semantically yama ‘mountain’ in (3a) is less affected by the climbing than it is in (3b). (3b) has the sense that John walked to the top of the mountain. In contrast, John may use any means to arrive at the top of the mountain in (3a). Therefore, yama ‘mountain’ receives a higher degree of affectedness from (3b) than (3a). In fact, the differences in meaning are confirmed when an instrument is added to the sentences (Nakamura, 1999):

   John-NOM helicopter-INSTR mountain-DAT climb-PST
   ‘John climbed a mountain with a helicopter.’

b. *John-ga helikoputaa-de yama-o nobot-ta
   John-NOM helicopter-INSTR mountain-ACC climb-PST
   ‘John climbed a mountain with a helicopter.’

The fact that (4b) cannot take the instrumental phrase shows that the action does not allow a situation in which the actor of the sentence uses other methods to climb up the mountain besides walking up there. In terms of affectedness, walking up a mountain involves a greater contact with the mountain than landing the helicopter on the top. Thus an affected object must be marked by the accusative marker. A not-quite-affected object receives the dative marker.
Since Hopper and Thompson first suggested using prototypicality to explain transitivity, many studies have been done on languages that are very different from English and other European languages. Various linguists have tried to boil down the parameters given in Hopper and Thompson (1980) to a more concise list of properties. Givón, among others, states that transitivity hinges upon only two main aspects (Givón 1984:20):

5). a. The presence of a visible, volitional controlling cause/agent; and
   b. The presence of a clearly visible result-registering effect/patient.

As to the first aspect, the agent, Givón does not mention it much in his discussion. The only prominent discussion of this part is the distinction between an agent-subject and an experiencer-subject. In English, these two types of subjects make no difference in terms of case marking and the positioning of the subjects:

6). a. He cut the tree.  ← Subject: Agent, Volitional, Controlling
   b. He heard a voice  ← Subject: Experiencer, Non-volitional, Non-controlling

Both types of subjects are marked the same way in English. In fact, traditionally, both sentences are considered to be transitive. However, in many other languages, the experiencer-subjects are often treated as if they are recipients of an internal change, and they are most commonly associated to verbs of cognition, sensation, or volition. The following examples can illustrate this fact:

Sensei-ni eigo-ga wakar-u
Teacher-DAT English-NOM understand-PRES
'The teacher understands English.'

b. Kannada (data from Sridhar 1979)

Maguvige bāyārike āgide
Child-DAT thirst has happened
'The child is thirsty.'

c. Sherpa (data from Givón 1984)

Ti mi-ti-la cenyi go-kyaa-sung
The man-DEF-DAT cup want-AUX-PFT
'The man wanted the cup.'

In all of these examples, the subjects are marked with/inflected for the dative case. Clearly, these subjects are not the agents of the actions. The sole reason for using this special case marking is due to the fact that these subjects are the experiencers/affected, which means that they are the ones who go through the states of understanding/happening/wanting. Since the subject is marked as a dative NP, and the direct object is marked as the nominative NP, syntactically these sentences are considered to be intransitive. Therefore, agentivity, volitionality, and being in control can play a key role in determining the transitivity of sentences.

The other important aspect of transitivity, according to Givón, is to have a clear visible result-registering effect/patient. In the discussion of (4), we have already seen the difference of having a totally affected object verses a partially affected object in Japanese.
A prototypical transitive sentence should have one of the following types of objects.

(Givón 1984 96-7):

8). a. Created object:
   He built a house.

b. Totally destroyed object:
   She smashed the glass.

c. Physically changed object:
   They bleached his hair.

d. Change in object's location:
   They moved the barn.

e. Change with an implied instrument:
   He kicked the wall. (foot)

f. Surface change:
   She washed his shirt.

g. Internal change:
   They heated the solution.

h. Change with implied manner:
   They murdered her. (‘kill’ with intent)

These examples above all involve an observable, physical, and tangible change, which meet one of the two major criteria of prototypical transitivity: result-registering effect/patient.
Since semantic transitivity is a matter of the degree of prototypicality, one may easily find examples where a syntactically transitive-looking sentence is made up of an object with less/no change. Examples can be found in English sentences like the following pair (data from Givón 1984:20):

9). He rode on the horse. He rode the horse.

\[\text{[horse is location]}\] \[\text{[horse is patient]}\]
\[\text{[horse is less controlled]}\] \[\text{[horse is more controlled]}\]
\[\text{[horse is less affected]}\] \[\text{[horse is more affected]}\]

The difference between marking on the horse as a locative NP and as a patient is parallel to the Japanese example in (3): the horse in He rode on the horse merely denotes a location where the riding occurred. Semantically the horse is not affected by the action; whereas the horse in He rode the horse shows that it is a participant in the event. It is viewed as being affected by the riding.

More examples similar to (9) can be found among languages where a less salient element in a sentence may be used to become the direct object of the sentence, making it a less-than-prototypical transitive sentence:

10). Verbs with a locative direct object (data from Givón 1984: 98)

- a. She entered the house (= 'go into the house')
- b. He approached the intersection (= 'move towards the intersection')
- c. She swam the Channel (= 'swim across the Channel')
11). **Verbs with a goal direct object** (data from Givón 1984: 99)
   
   a. He fed the cows ('gave them food')
   
   b. She painted the wall ('put paint on the wall')
   
   c. They dusted the crops ('put dust on the crops')

12). **Verbs with cognate objects** (Givón 1984: 105)
   
   a. She sang a gypsy song
   
   b. He danced an original dance.

In (10), the direct objects are more precisely the locations where the actions take place. One can paraphrase them using intransitive sentences without difficulty. The sentences in (11) seem to be related to ditransitive sentences. Nonetheless, the logical objects (the ones in parentheses are somehow implied semantically. The goal objects, then, are manifested as the direct objects of the sentences. (12) is the most interesting set of all. Semantically, the verbs in this set of sentences do not require the presence of any direct object. However, the sentences can appear in the form of any typical transitive sentence in English. When studied carefully, one may find that the 'objects' are actually the nominalized forms of the verbs. The objects do not carry much meaning, because they are already implied by the verbs.

To account for the variations, Givón suggests that the transitive verbs in these sentences and in the intransitive versions contribute different semantic perspectives. For instance, though each of the sentences in (10) can be expressed by an intransitive verb with a prepositional phrase indicating the location, the use of a direct object makes the location more salient. That is, the location where the event occurs becomes much more
important to the event than just a point of reference. Similarly, the use of cognate objects in (12) creates a sense that the action brings out an affected result -- the nominalized objects. Again, it has to do with how much result-registering effect/change one wants to put emphasis on.

Givón’s effort to restate Hopper and Thompson’s transitivity parameters in a more explicit manner has been echoed by other linguists. Yet not everyone agrees with his idea. One of whom is Tsunoda. In his various writings (e.g. Tsunoda 1985, 1994), Tsunoda claims that it is necessary to rank the ten parameters suggested by Hopper and Thompson in the order of their relevance to morphosyntactic comparison because ‘different parameters are manifested in different areas of grammar, and not all the parameters involved are equally relevant to a given morphosyntactic phenomenon’ (Tsunoda 1985: 395). He rephrases the ten parameters to form four major semantic factors (Tsunoda 1994: 4671) of semantic transitivity:

13). a. Participant: There are two (or more) participants: agent and patent.
   b. Agent: The agent carries out an activity volitionally and controls it.
   c. Activity: The activity is completed, realized, punctual, actual or affirmative (rather than uncompleted, unrealized, durative, potential or negative).
   d. Patient: The patient is affected by the activity, a change being caused in it.

Of the four factors listed above, (b) and (d) are very similar to what Givón sees as the most essential aspects of semantic transitivity. As mentioned above, Givón considers
these two aspects to have equal importance. However, Tsunoda argues that (a) and (d) are the two most important factors to define the notion of prototypical transitive verbs.

Upon surveying some of the world’s languages, Tsunoda finds that ‘the semantic factors (a) to (d) above are not equally relevant to the semantic characterization of what have been traditionally considered [Transitive Clauses]. The factors (a) and (d) are pertinent for this purpose in all languages. The factor (c) is less relevant, being applicable to only a portion of the world’s languages, and the factor (b) is by far the least relevant’ (Tsunoda 1994: 4672). He states that if a given language makes a distinction in the case markings of the nouns between the verbs *hit* and *kill* -- two of the most often used examples of transitive verbs, then it must be the case that *kill* would receive the transitive case marking. *Hit*, on the other hand, must receive a less transitive case marking. Such a distinction is found in Newari:

14). a. ji: shrestha-$\text{\textbar}$ sya-na
   1SG.ERG Shrestha-ABS kill-PFT
   ‘I killed Shrestha.’

   b. ji: shrestha-yata da-ya
   1SG.ERG Shrestha-DAT hit-PFT
   ‘I hit Shrestha.’

The reason behind this distinction, according to Tsunoda, is because of factor (d) - the affectedness of the patient. Although the meanings of both *kill* and *hit* imply an action being performed on the patients of the verbs, the action may not bring about a change in the hitting scenario, whereas killing must involved a change from being alive to being
dead. Therefore, the affectedness of patient, as seen by Tsunoda, is the most important factor to determine the transitivity of a verb.

From the discussion thus far, it is found that (1) transitivity is not just a syntactic phenomenon. Semantics as well as discourse are also factors that can affect the coding of transitivity in a given sentence. (2) Out of the ten parameters that Hopper and Thompson suggested, the most crucial factor that can influence transitivity is the affectedness of the object. The effect of this factor can be found in all languages of the world, according to Tsunoda.

3.3 DISCUSSIONS OF TRANSITIVITY IN CHINESE LINGUISTIC LITERATURE

Western linguistic literature has exerted a strong influence on the study of transitivity in Chinese (Her 1990: 2-3). The traditional notion of transitivity was accepted and adopted straight from Western linguistic literature into Chinese linguistics without anyone ever asking whether the notion is applicable. Since Chinese (which is used here as a general term for all the Chinese languages, including Mandarin and Cantonese) does not have any overt morphological marking on nouns and verbs, transitivity is determined by word order alone. That is, if there is a noun following the main verb, the verb is considered to be a transitive verb. If such a noun is not present, then the verb is an intransitive verb. We can see this assumption in many older writings about Chinese grammar. However, as discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, this way of defining transitivity has been widely questioned.
3.3.1 DISCUSSION ON CANTONESE

One of the few and the oldest descriptions of Cantonese grammar is Yuen Ren Chao's Cantonese Primer (1947). The book was written as a textbook for people who were interested in learning to speak Cantonese. Because of the fact that the book was intended to be a pedagogic textbook rather than a reference grammar, there was only a brief chapter on Cantonese grammar, and it did not explicitly discuss the notion of transitivity. The clearest statement Chao made about the difference between transitive verbs and intransitive verbs is this (Chao 1947: 38):

...kaq ‘still more’ is never followed by a noun, nor is fann-jeuk ‘fall asleep’ ever followed by a noun. On the other hand, tax ‘to beat’ is usually followed by a substantive. In other words, we can mark in a dictionary that normally ... fann-jeuk is an intransitive verb, tax is a transitive verb, etc., etc.

We can clearly see how transitive and intransitive verbs were defined in this textbook: transitive verbs are verbs with a noun following them; intransitive verbs are not followed by a noun. This way of subcategorizing verbs is a direct transfer of the notion of transitivity first defined in the western literature.

In her work on Cantonese verbs, Helen Kwok (1971) has also adopted the traditional view on transitivity. Following the ideas put forth by R.H. Robins (1964) and A.A. Hill (1958), she defines a transitive verb in Cantonese as a verb that may take one of four types of objects: the goal object, the causative object, the instrumental object, and
the locative object, and objects in Cantonese usually follow the verb. Here are examples of each type of object (data from Kwok 1971: 19) (my transcriptions):

15). a. **Goal object**

食咗飯未呀？
Sihk-jó faahn meih a?
eat-PFT rice yet PRT
‘Have you eaten (your) rice yet?’

b. **Causative object**

見到車撞。
gin dōu johng chē
see AM collide car
‘Saw cars colliding.’

c. **Instrumental object**

你敢洗凍水?
Léih gám sáí dung séui.?
you dare wash cold water
‘You dare to wash with cold water?’

d. **Locative object**

瞇地下嘅咋。
Fan deihháa ge ja.
sleep floor PRT PRT
‘(You) only sleep on the floor.’

Conventionally, the goal object and the causative object are commonly found across languages. But linguists may differ in the way (c) and (d) are labeled. From a typological point of view, having an instrumental phrase as the direct object is found in a few African languages (e.g. Chichewa, Kinyarwanda). But it is very rare to have a locative as the direct object of a sentence (only found in Kinyarwanda). Therefore,
simply treating (c) and (d) as transitive sentences without any justification is arguable. Moreover, although Chinese and some African languages seem to allow instrumentals and locatives to serve as direct objects, there are two major differences between these two types of languages: (1) The instrumental and locative direct objects are found in ditransitive constructions in the Bantu languages. (2) There is an affix added to the ditransitive verb to indicate the original case relation of these direct objects in the sentence (O'Grady 1996). Therefore, calling (c) and (d) direct objects in Cantonese may simply stem from the fact that (a) - (d) are analogically similar. If one were to see if (c) and (d) are true direct objects, a comparison between the syntactic properties of (a) and (b) on the one hand, and (c) and (d) on the other hand, is necessary.

Cheung (1972) studies the grammar of Cantonese spoken in Hong Kong (written in Chinese), and in his classification of verbs, he states that transitive verbs are capable of taking any kind of objects and basically can be categorized into eight main types (adopted from Cheung 1972: 76):

16). a. Object as the undergoer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daap</th>
<th>diksi.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ride on</td>
<td>taxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ride (on) a taxi.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Object as a location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dou</th>
<th>Heunggóng</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arrive</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Arrive in Hong Kong.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c. Object of someone/something in presence

出面 有 個 乞兒。
Chêutmihn yáuh go hâtyi.
outside have CL beggar
'There is a beggar outside.'

d. Object of a copular sentence

中國 係 一 個 好 大 㜲 國家。
Jünggwok haïh yât go hóu daaih ge gwokgâa.
China COP one CL very big POSS country
'China is a big country.'

e. Result of an action

本書 賣咗 三 蛞。
Bûn syû maaih-jo sâm mân.
CL book sell-PIT three dollar.
'The book was sold for three dollar.'

f. Object as an instrument

我 鍾意 寫 原子筆。
Ngôh jûngyi sé yuhnjîbat.
1SG like write ball pen
'I like to write (with) ball pen.'

g. Object of a causative action

跑 馬 跑 狗
Pâau má páau gáu
run horse run dog
'Run the horse and run the dog.'

h. Object of appearance, disappearance and existence

禮堂 入面 企 滿晒 人。
Láihtôhng yahpbihñ kéih mûnsaî yânh.
hall inside stand full people
'The hall is packed with people.'
On the other hand, Cheung states that intransitive verbs can only take cognate objects. He defines cognate objects as one of the following (the main verb and the so-called ‘cognate’ objects are in bold) (my transcriptions):

17). a. Noun that shows the number of times an action is performed:

咬 你 一 擔。

Ngáuh léih yāt daahm
bite you one bite
‘Bite you once.’

b. Noun that indicates the duration of time:

佢 香港 住咗 十年。

Kéuih háí Hēunggóng jyuh-jó sahplihn.
S/he LOC Hong Kong live-PFT ten years
‘S/he has lived in Hong Kong for ten years.’

c. Noun that shows the degree of the verb:

行 連 一步。 買 唔到 飛。

haahng chih yātbouh, máaih mhdóu fei
walk late one step buy NEG ticket
‘(Someone) gets there late, and misses the chance to buy tickets.’

d. Noun that shows a destination or a location where the action takes place:

嚟 香港 玩咗。

lái Heunggóng wáanhah
come Hong Kong play (visit)
‘Come visit Hong Kong.’

These ‘cognate’ objects are classified as nouns because they are often used in other constructions as nouns. It is similar to the English sentence ‘He came home’, where ‘home’ is used as a location in this case and elsewhere as a noun. Cheung’s analysis exhibits some differences from the previous studies. To say the least, he does not treat
the locative noun phrase as a true direct object. Thus, (15d) would have to be an intransitive sentence in his analysis. However, the shortcoming of his study is that he does not discuss how one can differentiate between the 'cognate' objects and the non-cognate objects. The classification seems to come from his own native speaker intuition. Furthermore, the use of the term ‘cognate object’ is inaccurate because in linguistic literature, cognate objects are reserved for nouns like *dream* in ‘I dreamed a dream.’ Cognate objects are semantically empty and are often the noun form of a verb. Instead of calling the nouns in (17a-d) cognate objects, this dissertation will call the objects in (17a-c) ‘adverbial objects’ and (17d) ‘object of a locative verb’.

The most recent work on Cantonese grammar as a whole is the first Cantonese reference grammar by Matthews and Yip (1996). In this reference grammar, Matthews and Yip have once again gone back to the traditional way of looking at transitivity. Here is how the reference grammar defines ‘transitive verbs’ (Matthews and Yip 1996: 417):

Transitive verbs are those which take or require a direct object. In Cantonese, many verbs are transitive whose counterparts in English are intransitive; in particular, verbs of motions such as *heui* ‘go’ may take objects.

In their discussion, objects are defined as noun phrases that immediately follow the verb. There seem to be three classes of objects: direct objects, directional objects and indirect objects. Direct objects are nouns that are directly affected by the action denoted by the verb. Indirect objects are indirectly affected by the action. But the status of directional
objects is not clearly stated. According to the definition of transitive verbs given in the statement above, *heui* ‘go’ with a directional object is used as an example of a transitive verb that is intransitive in English. Their analysis implies that directional objects are a subtype of direct objects. Because of the way they define transitive verbs, locatives are once again treated as the direct objects of verbs (in their terms ‘directional objects’) (data from Matthews and Yip 1996:136):

18). a. 去 香港
   *Heui Méihgwok*
go America
   ‘Go to America’

b. 出 门口
   *Chēut múnhháu*
out (exit) entrance
   ‘Go out of the door’

c. 睡 自己 搬 床 舒服 然。  
   *Fan jìgèi ge chòhng syāfhk dī*
sleep self POSS bed comfortable more
   ‘It’s more comfortable to sleep in one’s own bed.’

d. 我 吃過 北京 樓。
   *Ngóh sihk-gwo Bâkgîng Lâuh.*
eat-EXP Beijing House
   ‘I’ve eaten at the Beijing Garden.’

From the definition given above, *Méihgwok ‘America’, múnhháu ‘entrance’, jìgèi ge chòhng* “one’s own bed”, and *Bâkgîng Lâuh ‘Beijing House* are all examples of directional objects of the verbs, which means that many semantically intransitive verbs are forced to be labeled as transitive verbs.
Another type of verb, which they call VO compounds, is also questionable in terms of transitivity. Most commonly, VO compounds are verbs that bear an intransitive meaning, yet they are often accompanied by a generic object. Here are some examples of them:

19). a. 讀書
   duhk-syū
   read-book
   ‘to read’

   b. 唱歌
   cheung-gō
   sing-song
   ‘to sing’

   c. 飲嘗
   yám-yéh
   drink-stuff
   ‘to drink’

   d. 寫字
   sē-ji
   write-word
   ‘to write’

It is unclear whether the noun phrases in these examples are really direct objects of their verbs, which make the verbs transitive, or whether they are merged with the verbs to form a single lexical unit, which would make the units intransitive. Matthews and Yip do not label them as either, and this poses another problem in the study of transitivity in Cantonese.

These constructions are the main problem this dissertation intents to deal with. Are these seemingly transitive verbs really transitive? Can we consider directional objects to be real objects? How should the objects within the VO compounds be treated? In Chapters four, five and six, we will use various syntactic tests to analyze these sentences.
3.3.2 DISCUSSION ON MANDARIN

So far we have paid much attention to the literature on Cantonese, it should be interesting to see how transitivity is defined in Mandarin. Mandarin is the national language of China and Taiwan, and more linguistic work has been done on Mandarin than on any other Chinese language.

Glancing through the discussion of transitivity in Mandarin, once again we see a difference in handling problematic noun phrases like locatives and cognate objects. Henne (1977: 16) states that ‘the different between transitivity and intransitivity is not absolute’ in Chinese. Transitive verbs, in a broad sense, are verbs that can take a wide variety of objects. Intransitive verbs, in contrast, often do not take any object. In cases where a noun phrase is attached, it is very likely to be a cognate object, which indicates ‘the duration of an action, or the quantification of an action, i.e. how many times an action occurred’ (Henne 1977:164). In addition, verbs of motion, like lai ‘come’ and qu ‘go’ are not transitive verbs, though they take objects that express a location. In other words, Henne believes that noun phrases that express the number of times an action is performed, like liangci ‘two times’, and locations like Zhongguo ‘China’ are not really direct objects of their respective verbs. This analysis corresponds to the analysis Cheung (1972) puts forth (as in example (17) above).

On the other side of the coin, Li (1972) argues indirectly that intransitive verbs should have no object following them. In an attempt to redefine the terms topic, subject, direct object, etc., Li made the following proposal (Li 1972:130):
1. A topic, subject, or direct object is always unmarked by a coverb or postverb. An indirect object or a preposed object may be marked.

2. A direct object is the first unmarked NP after the verb ((4) on his list).

Li clearly states that a noun phrase unmarked by a coverb or a postverb is the direct object of the sentence if it is the first one to follow the verb. Based on this definition, any noun phrase, including the cognate objects and the locative noun phrases that we discussed above, should all be considered to be direct objects of the verb, and thus intransitive verbs should not take any direct object at all. This definition brings us back to the traditional way of defining transitivity in the western linguistic literature: a transitive verb takes a direct object, but an intransitive verb does not take any direct object.

Lastly, any review on Mandarin grammar without mentioning the classic reference grammar by Li and Thompson (1981) cannot be complete. In their discussion on transitivity, Li and Thompson follow the traditional notion on transitivity, and state that each transitive verb has a meaning that requires two participants, one of which acts upon the other one. It is worth noting that they use the word 'meaning', which allows some sentences that have no overt object to be taken as transitive. Mandarin, as well as many other Chinese languages, allows the subject or the object to be dropped if the context can provide the necessary interpretations. Here is an illustration.
20). A: 你買了 那本書 未 (有)?
Ni mai le nei ben shu mei (you)?
you buy PFT that CL book not
‘Have you bought that book?’

B: 已經 買 了。
yijing mai le.
already buy PFT
‘(I) have already bought (it).’

Notice in B’s response, both the subject and the object are not present. Yet, the verb is still transitive because the context gives the listener clues to identify the subject and the object.

As for the problem with locative noun phrases and cognate objects, there is no discussion of these constructions. However, based on the definition that Li and Thompson put forth, one may argue that they do not consider sentences with a bare locative noun phrase or a cognate object to be transitive, because there is no overt transfer of action from the subject to the object. In contrast to the lack of discussion of these constructions, Li and Thompson have an extensive discussion of another type of problematic construction -- the VO compounds. As seen in (19), VO compounds are verbs with a generic object. Together they often function as an intransitive unit. As mentioned by Li and Thompson, VO compounds are highly idiomatic in meanings, but their forms are very similar to the syntactic structure verb + object. In fact, though Li and Thompson call them lexical units, some VO compounds partially retain some syntactic properties of the verb-plus-object construction. Traditional orthography cannot provide
any clue also, since it does not indicate word breaks. Therefore, orthography does not help distinguishing between lexical units and phrases. More will be said in Chapter five.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter we have tried to study the development of how linguists define transitivity. We find that the traditional view on transitivity encounters a lot of unresolved problems, since there are many in-between constructions that have properties of both transitivity and intransitivity. The problems become more confusing in Chinese, since Chinese lacks any kind of case marking on the nouns. Defining transitivity in terms of word order alone poses a great dilemma: how should the locative NPs, the instrumental NPs, and even the VO compounds be treated. Are the postverbal NPs O arguments? Or should they be regarded as something else? In the next three chapters, we will study transitivity on the syntactic level. Various tests will be used to determine the transitivity of these problematic constructions.
Chapter 4

Syntactic Transitivity I

4.1 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, we will focus our discussion on defining transitivity from the syntactic point of view. As seen in the previous chapter, many problems are encountered when the traditional notion of transitivity is employed to analyze sentences in Cantonese and Mandarin. Conventionally, transitivity is defined in terms of subjects (A and S) and objects (O). So if a sentence has an A and an O, it is a transitive sentence. In contrast, if a sentence lacks the O NP, it is intransitive. In languages like English and other European languages, there are multiple clues to show the grammatical relations in a sentence: word order, case marking and/or agreement. Defining A, S and O is relatively simple. However, this is not the case in Chinese. One of the main reasons is that neither Cantonese nor Mandarin have a case-marking system, neither is agreement found in the languages. Therefore, transitivity is defined solely on the basis of word order. In simple declarative sentences, identifying the grammatical relations may not be too hard; but when sentences involve questionable elements, defining the transitivity of these sentences becomes an arbitrary choice. In Chapter three, we reviewed some previous works on transitivity in Cantonese and Mandarin. And we have to conclude that using the traditional definition of transitivity to describe these languages brings out more questions...
than answers. On some of the problematic constructions, a consensus cannot be reached.

For instance:

1). a. 去美國。
   Heui Méihgwok
go America
   ‘Go to America’

   b. 睡自己 岔床 舒服 的。
   Fan jihgéi ge chòhng syúfuhk dí
sleep self POSS bed comfortable more
   ‘It’s more comfortable to sleep in one’s own bed.’

These two examples contain what are known as locative NPs. In (1a), Méihgwok ‘America’ follows right after the verb heui ‘go’. Similarly, jihgéi ge chòhng “one’s own bed” follows directly after the verb fan ‘sleep’. Different linguists have different views on this construction. On the one hand, one may argue that Méihgwok ‘America’ and jihgéi ge chòhng “one’s own bed” are the O NPs of their respective sentences because they are not accompanied by an element that indicates location (preposition/coverb), and therefore they directly follow the verb. So these two sentences must be transitive. On the other hand, other linguists may argue that the meanings of the verbs heui ‘go’ and fan ‘sleep’ do not imply the presence of an O NP, and so the locative NPs should not be treated as real Os. In other words, these two sentences should be intransitive.

Both points of view sound equally plausible, and the determination seems to rely solely on one’s intuition. However, one must ask this question: Is there any objective way one can study transitivity in Chinese in general? We believe that the notion of transitivity can and should be determined by syntactic tests. There are certain syntactic
properties that can distinguish an O from an oblique noun phrase. In this chapter, some of these syntactic tests will be used to help draw a conclusion to these problematic constructions in Cantonese.

4.2 Scope of this study

Since there are so many syntactic constructions in Cantonese, we must limit our study to a few problematic ones.

In this chapter, we will discuss the syntactic properties of three types of verbs. These verbs seem to carry a direct object in their respective sentences, but semantically they do not require more than one argument. These three types of verbs are: (i) Verb of motion (MV), (ii) Locative verb (LV), and (iii) Verb with an adverbial object (AOV). (1a) above is a sentence that contains a MV. (1b) above indicates the LV construction. As for the third type, there are three subtypes (2 a-d).

2). a. Adverbial object that indicates the number of times an action is performed (AOVI):

我 今日 咳嗽 兩 音。
Ngóh gányahht kâ̇k-jó léu̍n̄g sêng.
1ST SG today cough-PFT two sound
'I coughed a bit today.' (lit. 'I cough twice today. ')

b. 但 解釋吃 三次 異 我 聽。
Kéúih gáihhik-jó sā̍m chi béi ngóh teng
3RD SG explain-PFT three times to 1ST SG listen
'S/he has already explained (it) three times to me.'
c. Adverbial object that indicates a time expression (AOV2):

你哋 喺度 住咗 六 年 啦 咯。
Léihdeih häi douh jyuh-jó luhk lihn la wo.
2nd PL LOC here live-PFT six years PRT PRT.
‘You have lived here for six years.’

d. Adverbial object that indicates a distance (AOV3):

阿哥 嘅日 會 跑 二十 里。
Agó tíngyaht wúih páu yihsahp léih.
Elder brother tomorrow will run twenty miles
‘(My) elder brother will run twenty miles tomorrow.’

These three different types of constructions, which can arguably be transitive or intransitive, will be examined first. More details of these constructions will be given in the later sections.

After examining these three problematic constructions, in chapter five, some other controversial constructions will be analyzed. These constructions include the bèi construction (passivization), the jēung construction (the equivalent of the ba construction in Mandarin), the VO compounds (as mentioned in Chapter 2), and the coverb constructions. These constructions have been widely discussed in Mandarin (especially the ba construction), and they will be discussed using Cantonese data. In Chapter six, we will deal with another problematic construction, which is known as the Ergative construction.

4.3 The Syntactic Tests

There are syntactic tests that can show differences in behavior between a direct object and an oblique noun phrase. In this dissertation, three tests will be employed. They will first be used to analyze the Verb of Motion construction and the Locative Verb
construction, and the Verb with an Adjective Object construction. Other tests will be added at a later time when necessary.

4.3.1 TEST 1: RELATIVIZATION

Using data from about fifty languages, Keenan and Comrie (1977) propose the universal properties of relative clauses (RCs). They define and examine various relative-clause forming strategies, and develop the ‘Accessibility Hierarchy’, which expresses the relative accessibility to relativization of NP positions in simplex main clauses’ (1977: 66).

Accessibility Hierarchy

Subject (A, S) > Direct Object (O) > Indirect Object (E) > Oblique >
Genitive > Object of Comparison

According to Keenan and Comrie, different languages allow different NP positions to undergo relativization. Some languages only allow the A and S to be relativized (e.g. Malagasy), while some other languages may relativize all six positions (e.g. Classical Arabic, Modern Greek). The generalization is that if a language can relativize a NP position on the hierarchy, all the positions on the left are also capable of being relativized. Another generalization entailed from the Accessibility Hierarchy is that if a language can use its primary relativization strategy on a relativized position, all the positions on the left must also use the same strategy for relativization. As discussed in Keenan and Comrie,

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1 The discussion in this dissertation will be limited to restrictive relative clauses only.
there are two common relativization strategies among languages: the gap strategy and the pronoun (retention) strategy.

4.3.1.1 DEFINITION OF RCs.

Before we begin testing the Cantonese data, it is necessary to define the notion of RCs. According to the *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, an RC is 'a subordinate clause introduced by a relative pronoun or adverb' (Hartmann and Stork, 1972). This definition obviously can describe RCs that resemble those in English. However, linguistic facts show that many languages do not use any relative pronoun or adverb to begin an RC. Therefore, a more general definition is called for. A widely accepted definition is that a RC is ‘an S[entence] that “modifies” a head N[oun] by restricting the set of potential referents’ (O'Grady 1996). Consequentially, one of the properties of RCs is that the head noun must be specific, since the modifying sentence sets the domain of the head noun.

4.3.1.2 RCs IN ENGLISH

English is one of the few languages in Keenan and Comrie (1977) that allows all the NP positions on the hierarchy to undergo relativization. Here are some examples of each NP position:

3). *Relativizing the S position*

a. The woman came.

b. The woman *[rel, who/that ___ came] was looking for John.*

4). *Relativizing the A position*

a. The little boy kicked the ball.
b. The little boy [\textit{REL who/that }\underline{\textit{____}} \textit{kicked the ball}] fell.

5). \textit{Relativizing the O position}

a. Peter broke the vase.

b. The vase [\textit{REL which/that Peter broke }\underline{\textit{____}}] was an expensive antique.

6). \textit{Relativizing the E position}

a. Tom gave some money to the beggar.

b. The beggar [\textit{REL to whom/ * that Tom gave the money }\underline{\textit{____}}] thanked him.

7). \textit{Relativizing the Oblique position}

a. Tom saw a dragonfly near the riverbank.

b. The river bank [\textit{REL near which/ * that Tom saw a dragonfly }\underline{\textit{____}}] was beautiful.

8). \textit{Relativizing the genitive NP position}

a. The man’s watch fell to the ground.

b. The man [\textit{REL whose/ * that }\underline{\textit{____}} \textit{watch fell to the ground}] looked sad.

9). \textit{Relativizing the Object of Comparison position}

a. John is taller than the boy.

b. The boy [\textit{REL who(m)/ * that John is taller than }\underline{\textit{____}}] is eating.

From the examples above, we can clearly see that English uses the gap strategy for all six positions (represented by the lines within the brackets). Moreover, the RCs can be introduced by various relative pronouns, with the same phonological shapes as some of the interrogative pronouns in English. Also, besides the A and S position and the O position, all the other positions require the relative pronouns to be case-marked. For
instances, *whose* is the genitive form of *who*; *which* is used for non-human NPs. The A, S and O positions can be introduced by either a cased-marked relative pronoun (*who* for human nouns; *which* for non-human nouns) or the generic complementizer *that*.

### 4.3.1.3 RCs in Cantonese

According to Matthews and Yip (1996: 109), Cantonese has two different types of restrictive relative clauses. The first type resembles the possessive construction, which is used in formal situations, and it makes use of the possessive marker *ge*:

10). a. *Schematic Structure of Formal RCs:*

Relative clause - *ge* - noun

b. *An Intransitive Sentence:*

(Gó go) nahmyán fan-jó háidouh
that CL man sleep-PFT here
‘That/The man has been sleeping here.’

c. *Relativizing the S in (10b):*

(Gó go) ___ / *kéuih fan-jó hái douh) ge
that CL ___ / *3rd SG sleep-PFT LOC here POSS

man haih ngóh báhbá.

‘The man who has been sleeping here is my father.’

For this type, *ge* is used to connect the relative clause with the head noun it modifies. The second type, which is often used in colloquial Cantonese, uses the classifier of the head noun as the linking element.
11). a. *Schematic Structure of Colloquial RCs:*

Relative clause - (gó) - CL - noun

b. *Relativizing the S in (10b):*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[REL } & * \text{ Kéuih fan-jó hái douh] (gó) go nahmyán} \\
\text{1* ft ' & @'@ 0 & haih ngóh bāhbā.} \\
\text{COP} & 1\text{st SG father} \\
\text{‘The man who has been sleeping here is my father.’}
\end{align*}
\]

The classifier in this construction is referential, and thus links the relative clause with the head noun. The function of this classifier is equivalent to ‘the one’ or ‘the thing’ in English.

Since the second type is far more common in spoken Cantonese, and the range of relative clauses made from the second type is wider than the first type, this dissertation will only use the second type to construct examples. In the following examples, the (a) sentences are normal sentences before relativization, and the (b) sentences are the relativized versions of the (a) sentences.

12). *Relativizing the A position*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. Gó bān pahngyáuh chéng ngóhdeih sihk-faahn.} \\
\text{that CL friend invite 1\text{st PL eat-food} }
\end{align*}
\]

‘That group of friends invites us to eat.’
To relativize the S (11b) and the A (12b), the gap strategy is used. The resumptive pronoun strategy is not applicable.

Here is an example of how the O argument is relativized.

13). Relativizing the O

a. 

\[ \text{我 識啲 個 人 好 耐。} \]
\[ \text{Nghô sik-jô go go yâhnh houi loi.} \]
\[ 1^{\text{st}} \text{SG know-PFT that CL person very long (in time)} \]
\[ 'I have known that person for a long time.' \]

b. 

\[ \text{死啲。} \]
\[ \text{séi-jô.} \]
\[ \text{die-PFT} \]
\[ 'The person who(m) I have known for a long time died.' \]

Relativizing the direct object also makes use of the gap strategy. The pronoun strategy cannot be used.

The next position on the Accessibility Hierarchy is the E argument. Here is an example of it.
14. Relativizing the E

a. 你 送吃 钱 界 個 老人家。
Leih sung-jó dī chin béi gó go lóuhyâhngāa.
2<sup>nd</sup> SG send-PFT CL money to that CL elder person
‘You give money to that elder person.’

b. 你 送吃 钱 界 *___ / 併 (個) 個
[REL Leih sung-jó dī chin béi *___ / kéuìh] (gó) go
2<sup>nd</sup> SG send-PFT CL money to *___ / 3<sup>rd</sup> SG that CL
老人家 好 多謝 你。
lóuhyâhngāa hóu dójeh léih.
elder person very thankful you
‘The elder person you gave money to greatly appreciates you.’

For the first time, if the gap strategy is used, the sentence becomes ungrammatical.
However, the pronoun strategy is perfectly acceptable. It is predicted that starting from
this position onward, relativization must involve the use of the pronoun strategy only.

15. Relativizing the genitive NP<sup>2</sup>

a. 我 染 过 個 女子 的 頭髮。
Ngóh yim-gwo gó go léuihjái dī tâuhaat.
1<sup>st</sup> SG dye-EXP that CL girl CL hair
‘I dyed that girl’s hair (before).’

b. 我 染 过 *___ / 併 的 頭髮 (個) 個
[REL Ngóh yim-gwo *___ / kéuìh dī tâuhaat] (gó) go
1<sup>st</sup> SG dye-EXP *___ / 3<sup>rd</sup> SG CL hair that CL
女子 返 來 探 我。
léuihjái faan-jó láih taam ngóh.
girl return-PFT come visit 1<sup>st</sup> SG
‘The girl whose hair I dyed before came back to see me.’

---

<sup>2</sup> The discussion of relativizing the oblique NP is purposely skipped for later discussion.
Once again the data show that the pronoun strategy is used, just as expected. The gap strategy cannot be used.

The last position is the Object of Comparison. Cantonese also allows this position to undergo relativization, and here is an example of it.

16). *Relativizing the Object of Comparison*

a. 你 高 他 個 男仔。
Léih gōu gwo gó go nahmjài.
2ND SG tall surpass that CL boy
‘You are taller than that boy.’

b. 你 高 比 他 (個) 男仔 好
[rel Léih gōu gwo *____/kéuih] gó go nahmjài hóu
2ND SG tall surpass *____/3RD SG that CL boy very
憎 我。
jàng ngóh.
hate 1ST SG
‘The boy who(m) you are taller than hates me a lot.’

Lastly, to relativize the object of a comparison, the pronoun strategy is once again called for. The gap strategy is not allowed.

From the examples, we can see a pattern. The gap strategy is only used for relativizing the A, O and S. The pronoun strategy is needed for the other positions. Since there is a difference between the behaviors of relativizing core arguments and non-core arguments, we can simply use this test for the three problematic constructions defined above. If the constructions make use of the gap strategy to relativize a postverbal NP, then that NP must be an O, and the sentence must be a transitive sentence. On the
contrary, if the constructions require the use of the pronoun strategy, then the postverbal NP must be an oblique NP, and so the sentence must be an intransitive sentence.

4.3.1.4 Testing the Three Problematic Constructions

Going back to the main theme of this dissertation, we will first use relativization to test whether the three problematic constructions are transitive or intransitive. Again, the three constructions are: (i) Verbs of motion (MV), (ii) Locative verb (LV), and (iii) Verb with an adverbial object (AV).

For the MV construction, we will use five different MV verbs: heui ‘to go’, làih ‘to come’, yahp ‘to enter’, chëut ‘to get out/exit’ and sikh ‘to eat’. The first four verbs are intransitive in many languages. In Cantonese these verbs can take bare noun phrases without an intervening preposition/coverb. The last verb, sikh ‘to eat’, though is often used intransitively in many languages, can never take an object of location. But we find that in Cantonese the postverbal NP of sikh ‘to eat’ can be a location where the eating takes place. Here are some sample sentences containing these verbs:

17). a. 我 去吃 留 間 餐廳 食飯。
    Ngōh heui-jó gó gān chāntêng sikh-faahn.
    ‘I went to that restaurant to eat.’

   b. 你 去過 這裡 間 超市 到買 野。
    Lēih làih-gwo nī gān chiūkâpsīcheuhng máaih yeh.
    ‘You came to this supermarket to buy things (before).’
c. 小明 入室 做嘗。
Siuhmìng yah-pó gó gāan fōng jouh-yeh.
"Siuhmìng has entered that room to work."

d. heui 出室 疊 棟 大廈 吸菸。
Keuih chéut-pó gó dōng daihah kāpýin.
3rd SG out-PFT that CL building smoke
"S/he came out of/ exited the building to smoke."

e. 出室 買間 酒樓 好多 次。
Keuih sihk-gwo gó gāan jáu-láuh hōudō chi.
3rd SG eat-EXP that CL restaurant numerous times
"S/he has eaten at that restaurant many times."

18). Relativizing the sentences in (17)

a. RC of (17a)

我 去嘗 ____/* 疊度 食飯 做嘗 做間
[kēi Ngōh heui-pó ____/* godouh sihk-faahn] gó gāan
1st SG go-PFT ____/* there eat-meal that CL

restaurant 好 貴。
chānténg hōu gwai.

‘The place where I went to eat was very expensive."

b. RC of (17b)

你 買過 ____/* 癢度 買嘗 做間
[kēi Lêih láih-gwo ____/* nǔdōu máiái yeh] gó gāan
2nd SG come-EXP ____/* here buy things that CL

超級市場 昨日 執販。
chūkāpsicheuhng kāhmyaht jāp-pó.
supermarket yesterday close.down-PFT
‘The supermarket that you came to buy things before closed down yesterday.'
The relativization test shows some very interesting and surprising results. Sentences that have verbs like *go* and *come* are traditionally considered to be intransitive. From the point of view of semantics, it is very hard to imagine that both *go* and *come* could take any O NPs. Yet the examples (18a) and (18b), it is clearly shown that the use of the
pronoun strategy is not allowed when sentences with *heui* ‘to go’ and *làih* ‘to come’ are relativized. The gap strategy must be used to get the right constructions. The results suggest that the postverbal NPs in these two sentences are O arguments. That also means that *heui* ‘to go’ and *làih* ‘to come’ can be used transitively.

On the other hand, it is not possible to use the gap strategy to relativize the verbs *yahp* ‘to enter’ and *chëut* ‘to be out/exit’ in (18c) and (18d). The use of the resumptive pronoun *godouh* ‘there’ is preferred, though the sentences do not sound very natural. The unnaturalness is probably due to the fact that relative clauses are less used in Cantonese than in many other languages (Matthews and Yip 1996: 109). From the data in (18c) and (18d), they show that the bare NPs are not real Os. Rather, they are oblique NPs. Therefore, *yahp* ‘to enter’ and *chëut* ‘to be out/exit’ are intransitive verbs.

(18e) is also surprising. Similar to (18a) and (18b), the use of the pronoun strategy would make the sentence ungrammatical. That means the NP *gó găan jáulàuh* ‘that restaurant’, which indicates the location of eating, is a true argument of the verb *sihk* ‘to eat’. This is surprising because generally an O is something that is required by the semantics of the verb, and is often acted upon. But in (18e) the NP *gó găan jáulàuh* ‘the

---

3 The gap strategy can be used if *heui* ‘to go’ or *làih* ‘to come’ is added after the main verb. e.g.

```
| 币 | 出吃 | 去 | /
|---|---|---|---|
| 3rd SG | chëut-jó | heui | *

out-PFT | go | /

* godouh | kāpyīn | gó | dohung

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>大厦</th>
<th>就</th>
<th>前面</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| daihah | jauh | hāi | chihmīhmīn.

building | then | LOC | front

'The building that s/he came out of exiited to smoke is right in front.'
```

In this case, *chëut-jó heui* functions as a different verb, and the verb *heui* becomes a directional particle attached to the main verb.
restaurant’ is not the thing that is eaten. It is a place where the eating takes place. Nonetheless, the result from this test indicates that gó gān jáuláuh ‘the restaurant’ is an O, not an oblique NP.

The second type of the three problematic constructions is the Locative Verb construction (LV). LV is a construction that has a verb of posture with an object that denotes a location. Two verbs in Cantonese are chosen to undergo relativization: choh ‘to sit’ and fan ‘to sleep’.

19). a. 你 人 落 位 坐 夜 張 還 成 日。
Léih choh-jó gó jéung dang sèhng yaht.
2\textsuperscript{ND} SG sit-PFT that CL chair whole day
‘You sat on that chair for the whole day.’

b. 我 人 落 位 坐 夜 張 未 成 夜。
Ngóh fan-jó gó jéung chòhng sèhng máahn.
1\textsuperscript{ST} SG sleep-PFT that CL bed whole night
‘I slept on that bed for the whole night.’

20). Relativizing the sentences in (19)

a. RC of (19a)

你 人 落 位 坐 夜 張 還 成 日 常 張
[rel Léih choh-jó ___/* kéuih sèhng yaht] gó jéung
2\textsuperscript{ND} SG sit-PFT ___/* 3\textsuperscript{RD} SG whole day that CL

凳 係 我 落。
dang haih ngóh ge.
chair COP 1\textsuperscript{ST} SG PRT
‘The chair that you sat on for the whole day is mine.’
b. RC of (19b)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
[\text{RC of (19b)}] \\
我 \quad \text{踏吃} \quad _{\text{*_仑}} \quad \text{成} \quad \text{晚} \quad \text{嚼} \\
[\text{Ref} \quad \text{仑} \quad \text{fan-jó} \quad _{\text{*_keyih}} \quad \text{sēng} \quad \text{máahn}] \quad \text{gó} \\
1^\text{st} \text{SG} \quad \text{sleep-PFT} \quad _{\text{*_3rd \text{SG}}} \quad \text{whole} \quad \text{night} \quad \text{that} \\
\end{array}
\]

張
床
太過
軟。

jēung chõhng tāi gwo yûn.

‘The bed that I slept on for the whole night was too soft.’

Here we see that the verbs *choh ‘to sit’ and *fan ‘to sleep’ have a bare noun phrase following them, and the construction appears to be transitive. The results from the relativization test show that the use of the gap strategy is acceptable, and the pronoun strategy cannot be used. Again, in Cantonese, relativization of A, S and O requires the gap strategy, while non-core arguments use the pronoun strategy. Because of this difference, we have to conclude that these two verbs take true O NPs. The bare NPs can be locative O NPs without any overt locative marker.

The last type of construction this chapter is to explore is the Verb with an Adverbial Object (AOV) Construction. Within this construction we will look at three subtypes, and here are the examples of them (repeat of (2))

21). Adverbial object that indicates the number of times an action is performed (AOV):

a. 我
   今日
   咳吃
   兩
   聲。

Ngôh gāmyaht kāt-jó lēuhng sēng.
1\text{st} \text{SG} \quad \text{today} \quad \text{cough-PFT} \quad \text{two} \quad \text{sound}

‘I coughed a bit today.’ (lit. ‘I cough twice today.’)
b. 佢 解釋咗 三次 當 我 聽。
Kéuih gáaihsík-jó sāam chi bèi ngóh tēng
3SG explain-PFT three times to 1ST SG listen
'S/he has already explained (it) three times to me.'

c. Adverbial object that indicates a time expression (AOV2):

你聽 瞭 度 住咗 六 年 啦喝。
Léihdeih hái douh jyuh-jó luhk lihn la wo.
2PL LOC here live-PFT six years PRT PRT.
'You have lived here for six years.'

d. Adverbial object that indicates a distance (AOV3):

阿哥 聽日 會 跑 二十 里。
Agō tīngyáht wúih pâu yíhsahp léih.
Elder brother tomorrow will run twenty miles
'(My) elder brother will run twenty miles tomorrow.'

In each of these sentences the verb is followed by a bare noun phrase that indicates the number of times an action is performed (sometimes the number can be figurative), a noun phrase expressing the duration of time an action has been carried out, or a distance over which an action lasts. In all of these situations, the bare noun phrases are not the direct recipients of the action. Semantically speaking, they do not qualify to be an O for their respective verbs. Once again we will apply the relativization test to find out if they are Os or oblique NPs.
22). Relativization of (21)

a. RC of (21a)

[REL Ngôh gámyaht kát-jó ___ / * kéuíhdeih] gó léuhng
today cough-PFT ___ / * 3º PL that two

séng mh haih yânwaih nógh hàuhlùhng yáuh síh.
sound NEG COP because 1º SG throat have matter
‘The two coughs that I made were not a result of my having a throat problem.’

b. RC of (21b)

[REL Kéuíh gáaihsîk-jó ___ / * kéuíhdeih bêí nógh têng] gó
3º SG explain-PFT ___ / * 3º PL to 1º SG listen that

sáam chi duih Nógh hóuhmóuh jokyuling.
three times to 1º SG completely lack of impact.
‘The three times s/he explained (it) to me had no impact on me.’

c. RC of (21c)

[REL Léihdeih hái douh jyuh-jó ___ / * yatjûn] nî luhk
2º PL LOC here live-PFT ___ / * a while this six

lihn hok dôu di mâyéh ah?
years learn VPRT CL what PRT
‘What have you learned from the six years you have lived here?’
d. RC of (21d)

阿哥 聽日 會 跑 ___/*iral 段 路
[rel Agó tíngyáht wúih páu ___/*gó dun lou]
Elder brother tomorrow will run ___/*that CL road

ゴ 二十 里 對 但 軟講 好 容易。
gó yíhsáph léih duih kuíh leihgong hóu yohngyi.
that twenty miles to 3rd SG speaking very easy

'The twenty miles that (my) elder brother will run will be easy for him.'

The results from the relativization test are unanimous. They all show that the AOV construction, regardless of the subtypes, is transitive. In all of these sentences, the gap strategy is used to relativize them. The pronoun strategy cannot be used. Therefore, the relativization test concludes that the bare NPs following the main verbs in these sentences, though they may not be directly affected by the verbs in terms of semantics, are true Os.

4.3.1.5 Summary

In the previous section, we tried to use relativization as a test to find out if a bare postverbal NP is a core argument or an oblique NP. It happens that in Cantonese when a core argument (S, A, or O) is relativized, the relativized position must be a gap (the gap strategy). On the other hand, if an oblique NP is relativized, the relativized position must have a matching pronoun (the pronoun strategy). By studying how sentences respond to the relativization test, it is possible to determine whether the postverbal NP is a core argument (an O) or an oblique. Thus, the transitivity of these sentences can also be concluded (if a NP is an O, the sentence is transitive; if an NP is an oblique, the sentence is intransitive). Here is a summary of the findings so far:
Table 4.1: Summary of the relativization test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs of Motion (MV)</th>
<th>Relativization Strategy</th>
<th>Core Vs. Oblique</th>
<th>Transitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Verbs of Motion (MV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>heui</em> 'to go' (17a)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>làih</em> 'to come' (17b)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>yahp</em> 'to enter' (17c)</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Oblique</td>
<td>Intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>chëut</em> 'to get out/exit' (17d)</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Oblique</td>
<td>Intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sihk</em> 'to eat' (17e)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
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</table>

2. Locative Verb (LV)

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<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
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<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
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</table>

3. Verb with an Adverbial Object (AOV)

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<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>gáaïhsik saäm chi</em> 'to explain three times' (21b)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>jyuh luhk lihn</em> 'to live (here) for six years' (21c)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>páu yihsaph léih</em> 'to run twenty miles' (21d)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2 The *saai* Particle Test

According to Matthews and Yip (1996), Cantonese has a special particle, *saai*, that can quantify only the S argument or the O argument. This particle follows immediately the main verb of a sentence, and bears the meaning of ‘all’ or ‘completely’.

Here are some sample sentences with *saai*:

23) a. 伯哚 飲 晒 啞 果汁。
Këuihdei yám saai dī gwøjäap.
3<sup>rd</sup> PL. drink all CL. juice
‘They have drunk all the juice.’

---

*Saai* is not capable of quantifying the A argument of a transitive sentence.
Example (23a) shows that saai ‘all’ quantifies dī gwojāap ‘the juice’, which is the O argument. Interestingly, even though the A argument is plural, which should allow it to be compatible with the meaning of saai, the interpretation does not support such an association. (23b) indicates that saai ‘all’ can also quantify the S argument. If the S argument is a singular noun, then the sentence would become odd semantically. (23c) shows that in a trivalent sentence with three possible candidates (A, O and E arguments) for quantification, the only NP that gets quantified is the O argument. Saai can quantify neither the A argument nor the E argument. (23d) shows that saai cannot quantify ngóhdeih ‘us’, which is an oblique NP. It has to quantify the O argument in the sentence.

4.3.2.1 TESTING THE THREE PROBLEMATIC CONSTRUCTIONS

Given the syntactic facts about the saai particle, it is time to put them to use. Once again, we want to test the three types of problematic sentences in Cantonese. If the saai particle can quantify a bare postverbal NP, then the conclusion is that this NP is a true O argument, and the sentence containing the argument is transitive. But if saai
cannot quantify that NP, the NP must be an oblique NP, and the sentence is intransitive.

The three constructions being tested are: (i) Verbs of motion (MV), (ii) Locative verb (LV), and (iii) Verb with an adverbial object (AOV)

We will start with the discussion of MV first. In the previous test, we tested five different MV verbs, and they are: *heui* ‘to go’, *làih* ‘to come’, *yahp* ‘to enter’, *chēut* ‘to get out/exit’ and *sihk* ‘to eat’. We will continue to use the same verbs in the *saai* particle test.

24). a. 我們 已經 去過 晒 東南亞。
   Nqóhdeih yiqing heui-gwo saai dōngnahmngaa.
   1ST PL already go-EXP all Southeast Asia
   ‘We have already been everywhere in Southeast Asia.’
   or ‘We have all been to Southeast Asia.’
   or ‘We have all been to everywhere in Southeast Asia.’

   b. 但他們 曾過 晒 倫敦 嚇 嚇 啦？
      Kéuihdeih làih-gwo saai luhnđůn ga la?
      3RD PL come-EXP all London PRT PRT
      ‘Have they been to everywhere in London?’
      or ‘Have they all been to London?’
      or ‘Have they all been to everywhere in London?’

   c. 人 入 晒 間 房 做 乜？
      Dī yǎhn yahp saai gāan fōng jouh māt?
      CL people enter all CL room do what?
      ‘Why do all the people enter into the room?’

   d. 你哋 出 晒 棟 大廈 呢？
      Lêihdeih chēut saai dohng daihah gé?
      2ND PL out all CL building PRT
      ‘Why did all of you come out of the building?’
The sentences here show some very interesting facts. First of all, for (24a), (24b) and (24e), the particle saai ‘all’ can quantify the postverbal NPs. Of the three interpretations in each of these sentences, the first interpretation is always the easiest to retrieve. The more interesting aspect is that the sentences also allow saai to be linked to the A argument, or even to both the A and O arguments at the same time. One of the approaches to analyze this is that these verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively, and so speakers may get the meanings from both the transitive reading and the intransitive reading of the verbs. Another analysis is to assume that there are two homophonous versions of the verbs heui ‘to go’, làih ‘to come’ and sihk ‘to eat’ where one is always transitive and the other is always intransitive. Therefore, the multiple interpretations in (24a), (24b) and (24c) is the result of saai interacting with both versions of the homophonous verbs. Both of these analyses can explain the facts, and therefore we are not going to take a stand on picking one over the other. As for (24c) and (24d), the results are compatible to what we found in the relativization test. The postverbal NPs in these sentences are not real core arguments. Saai can only associate its meaning with the preverbal argument in each of these sentences, which is the S argument.

5 The third interpretations of (24a), (24b) and (24e) seems to show that saai can quantify the A argument. This exception seems to be rare, and we don’t have an analysis to account for it at this point.
Next we will test the Locative Verb construction. The verbs in this construction
denote some posture and a bare NP that denotes a location follows the verb. We used
choh ‘to sit’ and fan ‘to sleep’ in the previous test, and the results showed that the bare
objects are real core arguments of the verbs. Let us now test them again using the saai
particle test.

25) a. "You shouldn't sit on the whole bench. (You should) save some space for others.'

b. "No one will say a word even if we sleep on the whole floor.'

The results from the saai test point out that the locative noun phrases are O arguments,
because they can be quantified by saai. The preverbal arguments cannot be quantified by
saai at all.

However, there is another interesting fact about the Locative Verbs. If the O
arguments are not definite, they lose their O status, and saai then quantifies the preverbal
argument. Here are the indefinite counterparts of (25):
26) a. 你哋唔好坐哂凳啦。攞啲
Léihdeih mhhóu choh saai dang læ. wán dī
2ND PL NEG sit all bench PRT look.for CL

人企起身啦。
yāhn kēih héihsān læ.
people stand up PRT
‘You shouldn’t have everyone sit on a bench. Someone can stand up.’

b. 我哋瞓哂地下人地點行呀?
Ngóhdeih fan saai deihha yâhndehi dim hahng a?
1ST PL sleep all floor other people how walk PRT?
‘How can other people walk around when all of us sleep on the floor?’

Definiteness is defined in terms of presupposition, which refers to ‘information presumed shared by speaker and hearer’ (Bickerton 1981: 248). In some languages, specificity also plays a role in determining the grammatical relations of NPs. Specificity refers to whether a noun’s referent(s) can be identified as a particular entity, or as a class of entities in general. Therefore, besides being definite or indefinite, a noun can be interpreted as being specific or nonspecific. English doesn’t have a set of grammatical markers to distinguish specific from nonspecific. For instance:

(27a) A dog bit me yesterday.
(27b) I wanted to buy a dog.

A dog in (27a) is an example of an indefinite yet specific NP, whereas a dog in (27b) is indefinite and nonspecific.

Turning back to Cantonese, in (26a) and (26b), the postverbal nouns dang ‘bench’ and deihha ‘floor’ are indefinite because in Cantonese a definite noun requires the
presence of a classifier (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion). In terms of specificity, these nouns can be interpreted as either specific or non-specific in normal situations. Yet, with the contexts given in (26a) and (26b), they are interpreted as specific (confirmed by native speakers). That means in the hearer's mind, images of a particular place can be created as they hear the sentences. Therefore, the only difference between the examples in (25) and (26) is definiteness. When the postverbal NPs are definite (25a & 25b), they are quantified by *saai*. However, when the postverbal noun phrases are indefinite, as in (26a) and (26b), *saai* automatically quantifies the preverbal arguments. This entails that in such a situation, the postverbal NPs are no longer real O arguments. The preverbal argument in each of these sentences becomes the only core argument, and so it is the S argument. The sentences should then be considered to be intransitive.

Independent evidence to support this comes from topicalization. Matthews and Yip (1996: 77) points out that the topic of a sentence must be definite. Hence, if a noun is indefinite, it cannot undergo topicalization. We can take (25a) and (26a) as examples to show this point:

(28)a. Topicalizing (25a)

```
Pinyin: Jëung dang léihdeih mhhou choh saai là. lâuhfâan dî
CL bench 2ND PL NEG sit all PRT save CL

wai bêî yahndeih là.
space for other people PRT

'For the bench, you shouldn't take the whole portion. (You should) save some space for others.'
```
b. *Topicalizing (26a)*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dang leihdeih mhhóu choh saai lā. wán dī} \\
\text{bench 2ND PL NEG sit all PRT look for CL}
\end{align*}
\]

人企起身啦。

\[
\begin{align*}
yáhn kéih héihsān lā. \\
\text{people stand up PRT}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Bench, you shouldn’t have everyone sit down. Someone can stand up.’

Sentence (28a) is a topicalized version of (25a), where the postverbal noun is definite. However, when the noun is indefinite, it cannot be topicalized (28b). We believe such a shift between an O argument and an oblique NP can be accounted for by semantic transitivity, which was suggested by Hopper and Thompson (1981) (see Chapter three). That is to say, when an O argument is indefinite, the NP becomes less affected by the action. This in turns lowers the semantic transitivity of the sentence to the point where it becomes intransitive, which is why *saai* can only quantify the preverbal NP. Thus, *saai* treats the sentence as intransitive and quantifies the preverbal NP.

The last construction under discussion in this chapter is the ‘Verb with an adverbial object’ (AOV) construction. In this construction the verb takes a bare NP which represents the number of times an action is performed, a time expression, or a distance. From the first test we concluded that these bare NPs are all true O NPs. Now let us apply the *saai* test and see if the results match.
29) a. *Adverbial object that indicates the number of times an action is performed (AOV1)*:

*[殲] 今曰 咳 嗅 兩 聲。
*Ngóhdeih gāmyaht kāt saai léuhng sēng.
1ST PL today cough all two sound

*‘All of us cough a bit today.’

b. *恒他 解释 晋 三次 界 我 聆。
Kéuindeih gáihsík saai sām chī béi ngóh tēng.
3RD PL explain all three times to 1ST SG listen
‘They have explained all three times to me.’

c. *Adverbial object that indicates a time expression (AOV2)*:

你他瞭度住俳六年啦唱。
Léihdeih hái douh jyuh saai luhk lihn la wo.
2ND PL LOC here live all six years PRT PRT

‘You have lived here for all six years.’

d. *Adverbial object that indicates a distance (AOV3)*:

阿哥聽日會跑俳二十里。
Agó tīngyaht wúih pvā saai yihshāp léih.
Elder brother tomorrow will run all twenty miles

‘(My) elder brother will run all twenty miles.’

The first sentence of this set is ungrammatical. The reason for its ungrammaticality has nothing to do with its structure. There simply is an incompatibility between the use of *saai* ‘all’ and the bare NP *léuhng sēng* ‘two sounds’. We will explain this further below.

But first, let us explain the rest of the sentences.

The last three sentences are perfectly acceptable, and the term *saai* can quantify their postverbal NPs. So the *saai* test leads us to conclude that the bare NPs in (29b-d) are true O arguments. However, there is a presupposition in each of these sentences from
the use of *saai*. If the presupposition can exist, then the sentences *saai* quantifies are grammatical (as in 29b-d). If the presupposition cannot exist, the sentences will simply be unacceptable (as in 29a). What is the presupposition? In (29b), for example, the use of *saai* implies that the people who make the explanation (*kéuihdeih* ‘they’) agree to explain no more than three times to the recipient (*ngóh* ‘me’). When *saai* is used, the sentence bears the meaning that the recipient has received the maximum number of explanations that the speakers and the recipient had previously agreed upon. Similar situations are found in (29c) and (29d). The presence of *saai* means that the maximum number of years to live in that place is used up (29c), or the maximum distance will be completed (29d). Given such a presupposition, the unacceptability of (29a) can easily be explained.

Coughing is an involuntary act, and one cannot set a limit on the number of times coughing can take place. Therefore, the concept of achieving the maximum number of an action implied by the meaning of *saai* and the involuntary act of coughing are incompatible. Therefore, the result from the *saai* test for (29a) is inconclusive.

4.3.2.2 Summary

In the previous section we have applied the *saai* test to the three problematic constructions to further show if the postverbal bare NPs are the O arguments of their respective sentences or the oblique NPs. The *saai* test is a useful test because it only quantifies the S argument or the O argument. Therefore, if the sentences under consideration have a bare postverbal NP that *saai* can quantify, then the NP must be an O argument and the sentence is thus transitive. However, if the bare postverbal NP cannot be quantified, but the preverbal NP can be, then the postverbal bare NP must be an
oblique NP, and the sentence is then intransitive. Here is a summary of the findings in this section.

Table 4.2: Summary of the saai particle test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Verbs of Motion (MV)</th>
<th>Quantifying the postverbal NP?</th>
<th>Core Vs. Oblique</th>
<th>Transitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>heui</em> ‘to go’ (24a)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>làih</em> ‘to come’ (24b)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>yahp</em> ‘to enter’ (24c)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Oblique</td>
<td>Intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>chêut</em> ‘to get out/exit’ (24d)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Oblique</td>
<td>Intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sihk</em> ‘to eat’ (24e)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
<td>Transitive</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>fan</em> ‘to sleep’ (25b)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>jyu̍h lu̍hk li̍hm</em> ‘to live (here) for six years’ (29c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>pâu yihsaph léih</em> ‘to run twenty miles’ (29d)</td>
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4.3.3 THE MÁAIH TEST

In addition to the particle saai, màaih is another verbal particle in Cantonese that has a very similar syntax to saai. There are a few related meanings of màaih, which include ‘in addition’, ‘along’, and ‘to bring certain ongoing actions to completion’. Similar to saai, màaih may modify the S argument and the O argument. For example:
30).  *Intransitive*

**a.** 小明 都 走 埋 啦，我 重 留 哪

Siuming also leave VPRT PRT 1ST SG still stay LOC

度 做 乜 嗑？
douh jouh māt wo?
here do what PRT
‘Even Siuming left along (with many other people), why should I still stay here?’

**b.** 呢 個 遊戲 好好 玩 的。 不如 你 都

Ni go yáuhhei hóuhóu wáan ga. bátyūh léih dōu
this CL game very play PRT why not 2ND SG also

玩 埋 啦？
wáan màaih là?
play VPRT PRT
‘This game is really fun, why don’t you play along?’

31).  *Transitive*

**a.** 我 會 帶 埋 我 隻 狗 去 街。

Ngōh wūih dai màaih ngōh jek gáu heui gāi.
1ST SG will bring VPRT 1ST SG CL dog go street
‘I will bring my dog along to go out.’

**b.** 佢 做 食 完 蝦，跟住 食 埋 螃。

Kéuihdeih sihk yūhn hāa, gānyju sihk màaih háaih
3RD PL eat finish shrimp then eat VPRT crab
‘They finished eating shrimps, then ate crab (in addition).’

32).  a.  *Transitive with an E argument*

我 送 埋 嬰 書 給 你。

Ngōh sung màaih dī syū bèi léih
1ST SG give VPRT CL book to 2ND SG
‘I gave you all the books, (in addition to many other things).’
b. *Transitive with an oblique NP*

The examples above indicate how *mâaih* behaves in both transitive and intransitive sentences. The noun phrase (X) modified by *mâaih* bears the meaning of ‘in addition to something/someone, X also undergoes the same action’. (30) shows two examples of intransitive sentences with *mâaih*. In these two sentences, the S arguments are in addition to what has been happening. Therefore, in both cases, we can assume that some people have left (30a) / are playing the game (30b). The use of *mâaih* shows that the S argument also joins into the action.

Furthermore, (31) indicates the syntactic behavior of *mâaih* with respect to transitive sentences. In both (31a) and (31b), the noun phrases whose reference joined in addition to others are not the A arguments, but the O arguments. Therefore, *ngôh jek gâu* ‘my dog’ went out in addition to *ngôh* ‘I’ (31a), and *hâaih* ‘crabs’ were eaten in addition to *hâa* ‘shrimps’.

(32a) shows that *mâaih* does not modify the E argument *léih* ‘you’. It only modifies the O argument in the sentence. (32b) demonstrates that *mâaih* does not modify the oblique NP *ngôh* ‘I’. Again, it modifies the O argument of the sentence.

This test can help determine if a sentence is transitive or intransitive. If *mâaih* is added to the sentences under study, and it modifies the preverbal NP instead of the postverbal bare NP, then we have to conclude that the postverbal bare NP is not an O...
argument. The sentence is then intransitive. In contrast, if the postverbal NP is modified, then it is an O argument, and the sentence is a transitive sentence.

4.3.3.1 TESTING THE THREE PROBLEMATIC CONSTRUCTIONS

Once again, we will test the three problematic constructions here. Based on the results we will determine whether they are transitive or intransitive.

The first type is the MV. The five verbs that we have been using are *heui* ‘to go’, *lāih* ‘to come’, *yahp* ‘to enter’, *chēu* ‘to get out/exit’ and *sihk* ‘to eat’.

33). a. 我去加拿大，顺便去 埋 美國。
Ngō heui yūn gālahdai, scunbīn heui màaih Méihgwok.
1st SG go finish Canada on the way go VPRT America
'I will go to Canada, and (since I will be there) I will also go to America.'

b. 你 纔 埋 夏威夷 就 成 個 美國 都
Léih làih màaih hahwāiyi jauh sèhng go Méihgwok dōu
2nd SG come VPRT Hawai'i then whole CL America all
行過 啯。
hahng-gwo saai.
walk-EXP all
'After you come to Hawai‘i, then you will have been to all of America.'

c. 但 入 執 廁所 搶 個 銀包。
Kéuih yahp màaih chisó wán go ngahnbáu.
3rd SG enter VPRT bathroom look for CL wallet
'Even s/he (along with many others) has entered the bathroom to look for the wallet.'
'S/he even entered the bathroom (in addition to other places) to look for the wallet.'
d. 你哋出埋個車房揀下啦。
Léihdeih chëut màaih go chëföng wán háh lá.
2nd PL out VPRT CL garage look for PRV PRT
‘Why don’t you (like the others) go out to the garage to look for (it)?’
‘Why don’t you go out to the garage (among other places) to look for (it)?’

e. 我哋食埋呢間酒樓先講。
Ngóndeih sihk maaí ní gān jàulàuh sìn góng.
1st PL eat VPRT this CL restaurant then discuss
‘We will eat at this restaurant before we discuss (anything).’

From the meaning of (33a), we can see that my going to America is an addition to my trip to Canada. This is a very typical example of the use of màaih. In a sense, the sentence implies that if I am not going to Canada, I probably won’t go to America. But since I am going to Canada, I will also make a trip to America. Màaih is modifying the postverbal NP, and the sentence is said to be transitive.

(33b) is also an example of how màaih modifies the object hahwái ‘Hawai’i’. The meaning of this sentence implies that coming to Hawai’i is in addition to having been to the other forty-nine states. The particle màaih cannot modify the preverbal NP. So clearly hahwái ‘Hawai’i’ is the O argument of the sentence, and the sentence should be considered to be transitive.

(33c) is very different from the previous sentences, because it allows more than one interpretation, depending on the context. On the one hand, the sentence can be interpreted as in addition to many other people, kêuih ‘s/he’ also entered the bathroom to do the searching. In this case, the preverbal NP is associated to màaih, and so the postverbal NP is an oblique NP. The sentence with this interpretation is intransitive. On the other hand, màaih can also modify the postverbal NP chísó ‘bathroom’. The sentence
bears the meaning that in addition to all the other rooms, the bathroom is also entered to search for the lost wallet. So clearly chisó ‘bathroom’ is the O argument of the sentence. (33d) is basically the same as (33c). There are two interpretations for this sentence. The first interpretation is that in addition to many other people, léihdeih ‘you (pl)’ should also go to the garage to look for (the lost thing). In this case, màaih modifies the preverbal NP rather than the postverbal NP, and so the NP go chëfohn ‘the garage’ is not an O argument. It is an oblique NP, and the sentence is intransitive. Besides the first interpretation, màaih can modify the postverbal NP go chëfohn ‘the garage’, and the meaning is that among other places, the garage should also be checked out. In this incident, the postverbal NP is an O argument and the sentence is transitive. In both (33c) and (33d), the first interpretation is preferable to the second interpretation. Lastly, the presence of (33e) implies that ngóhdeih ‘we’ have previously visited many other restaurants before eating at ní gāan jáulàuh ‘this restaurant’. Therefore, “eating at ‘this restaurant’” is in addition to the visitation of the previous restaurants. It means that màaih modifies the postverbal NP, and the sentence is a true transitive sentence.

The second construction we want to test is the LV construction, where the verb is followed by a bare NP that denotes a location. The verbs being tested are choh ‘to sit’ and fan ‘to sleep’.

34). a. 你她坐埋我個位啦。
Léihdeih choh màaih ngóh go wài la.
2ND PL sit VPRΤ 1ST CL seat PRT
‘You have taken my seat.’ (Lit: You have even sat on my seat.)’
b. 佢哋
唔夠床
，你哋可

Kêuihdeih mh gáuh chohng fan, léihdeih hó
3RD PL NEG enough bed sleep 2ND PL can

唔可以
瞓
埋
張
梳化
呀?
mhhóyi: fan màaih chêung sôfâa a?
cannot sleep VPRT CL sofa PRT

‘They don’t have enough beds to sleep on, can you even sleep on the sofa?’

The sample examples from (34) lead to the conclusion that both of these sentences are transitive. (34a) entails that in additional to some other seats, ngóh go wái ‘my seat’ is also taken. That means that the postverbal NP associates with the particle màaih, and therefore it is not an oblique NP. Besides, the sentence cannot mean ‘in addition to someone else, you (plural) have also taken my seat’. It is another support that the NP ngóh go wái ‘my seat’ is an O argument, and the sentence is transitive. As for (34b), the sentence clearly shows that all the beds are used up. So in addition to using the beds, it is asked if the sofa can be used as well. The additional part in this sentence is the postverbal NP sôfâa ‘the sofa’ rather than the preverbal NP léihdeih ‘you’. Once again, it shows that (34b) is a transitive sentence according to this test.

Next to be tested is the AOV construction. Once again we have three kinds of AOVs. The first one is to have an object that indicates the number of times an action is performed. The second one is to have an object that indicates a time expression, and the third category is to have an object that indicates a distance. Here are some sample sentences of this construction with màaih.
35). a. *Adverbial object that indicates the number of times an action is performed (AOV1):*

\[
\text{我 咳 喷 声 之后就 决定要 去}\ \\
\text{Ngóh kát màaih gó sêng jiháu jauh kütting-jó yiu heui}\ \\
\text{1st SG cough VPRT that sound after then decide-PFT need go}
\]

睇 醫生 嘻。
tái yísâng lak.
see doctor PRT
‘After I coughed that cough too, I decided that I need to go see a doctor.’

b. "解释 埋 呢 次 就 総共 解释
Kéuih gáaihskins màaih ní chi jauh júngung gáaihskins-jó
3rd SG explain VPRT this time then total explain-PFT

三 次 嘻。
sâarn chi lak.
three times PRT
‘S/he will have explained (it) three times after explaining this time.’

c. *Adverbial object that indicates a time expression (AOV2):*

\[
\text{我 住 埋 呢 六 年 就 可以 申请}\ \\
\text{Ngóh jyu ñ màaih ní luhk lihn jauh hóyí sâncing}\ \\
\text{1st SG live VPRT this six years then can apply}
\]

入籍。
yahpjek.6
become citizenship
‘I can apply for citizenship after living (here) for an additional six years.’

---

6 *Màaih* seems to be affected by definiteness also. When *luhk lihn* ‘six years’ is indefinite, the sentence is much less acceptable.
d. Adverbial object that indicates a distance (AOV3):

阿哥 只要 跑埋 三 里 就 夠 嘢。

Agō jiyū pāo màaih săam léih jauh gauh lak.

Elder brother only run VPRT three miles then enough PRT

‘(My) elder brother only needs to run an additional three miles, then it will be enough.’

From the màaih test, we can conclude that sentence (35a) is a transitive sentence because màaih modifies the postverbal NP rather than the preverbal NP. Here the sentence points out that in addition to the previous coughs, coughing one more time led to the decision to visit a doctor. The sentence does not mean that besides other people, ngóh ‘I’ also coughed. Therefore, the postverbal NP is an O argument. The sentence should then be a transitive sentence. (35b) is similar to (35a). Màaih also modifies the postverbal NP, not the preverbal one. Here the sentence means that in addition to the previous explanations, explaining (the problem) one more time would mean that three explanations had been given. The preverbal NP has no association with màaih. The same situation is also found in (35c) and (35d). Màaih in these two sentences is also associated with the postverbal NPs. (35c) implies that six years are needed in addition to the number of years I have already lived at that location if I want to apply for citizenship. (35d) means that an additional three miles is needed to finish the running. The postverbal NPs are the additions. So (35c) and (35d) must also be transitive sentences.

4.3.3.2 Summary

In this section the màaih test was utilized. Màaih has multiple yet related meanings -- ‘along’, ‘in addition’, and ‘to bring an action to completion’. The syntax of màaih is very simple: it may modify either the S argument (of an intransitive sentence) or
the O argument (of a transitive sentence). Because of its syntactic behavior, it was used in this study as a test to see if a postverbal NP is an O argument, or whether it is just an oblique argument. If the meaning of màaih modifies the postverbal NP X (that is, if the meaning is 'X is also included in addition to some other similar situation'), then it is said that màaih modifies the NP X. It is then considered to be an O argument, and the sentence containing X is a transitive one. On the other hand, if màaih modifies the preverbal NP Y rather than the postverbal NP X, then the màaih modifies the NP Y. The NP X is considered not to be an O argument, but an oblique NP. The sentence is therefore intransitive. Here is the table that summarizes the findings based on the tests.
There is one thing worth noting here. According to the relativization test and the saai test, two of the MV verbs, *yahp* ‘to enter’ and *chēut* ‘to get out/exit’, consistently appeared to be intransitive (refer to the tables on p. 100 and p. 110). However, the results from the màaih test suggest that these two verbs can be interpreted as transitive or intransitive, which may be a contradiction to the findings from previous tests. My interpretation of this, which is similar to the explanation given to the many interpretations of *heui* ‘to go’, *làih* ‘to come’ and *sihk* ‘to come’ in (24a, b, and e), is that *yahp* ‘to enter’ and *chēut* ‘to
get out/exit' can be used transitively or intransitively. The context of the sentence can determine the appropriate transitivity of the sentence.

4.4 Conclusion from the previous tests

As we discussed in Chapter three, the notion of transitivity has never been defined clearly. For some linguists, having an NP that follows immediately after the verb is the only criterion to classify a verb as transitive (Chao 1947, Matthews and Yip 1996 for Cantonese; Li 1972 for Mandarin). Other linguists call certain verbs intransitive, even though these verbs have bare NPs following them (Kwok 1971, Cheung 1972 for Cantonese; Henne 1971 for Mandarin). The main difference between these two sides is mainly the three problematic constructions tested in the previous sections. Some would argue that these constructions are transitive, because the verbs are followed by bare NPs. But some express the point of view that these bare NPs are not directly affected by the actions denoted in the verbs, and they should not be considered to be real O arguments. Simply put, a consensus regarding the notion of transitivity was never achieved. In this dissertation, one of the goals is to settle the differences once in for all. We take the position that by using the appropriate syntactic tests, we can clearly determine if an immediately postverbal NP is a core argument or an oblique NP. The three constructions we tested so far are: (i) Verbs of motion (MV), (ii) Locative verb (LV), and (iii) Verb with an adverbial object (AOV), and the tests we employed here are the relativization test, the saai particle test and the màaih test.

The first type of verb is the MV. Within the discussion of MVs, two different subtypes were used: (1) Directional verbs that take bare NPs without the use of a
preposition between the verbs and the NPs. The verbs used in this dissertation are *heui* ‘to go’ and *làiḥ* ‘to come’, *yahp* ‘to enter’ and *chēut* ‘to get out/exit’. (2) Simple verbs that take objects of locations. The verb represented in the discussion is *sihk* ‘to eat’. The results of the tests show that the bare NPs following the verbs *heui* ‘to go’ and *làiḥ* ‘to come’ are the O arguments of the verbs, and therefore these verbs can be used transitively. For example:

36). a.

Heui  Méihgwok
go America
‘go to America.’

b.

Làiḥ  Hēunggóng
come Hong Kong
‘come to Hong Kong.’

The results from testing the verbs *yahp* ‘to enter’ and *chēut* ‘to get out/exit’ in (37 and b) suggest that they are basically intransitive in nature. All of our tests show that these two verbs are used intransitively. Hence, the postverbal bare NPs are not the O arguments of these verbs. They are oblique NPs. However, the *maaiḥ* test also shows that in some contexts, these two verbs can be interpreted as transitive, although this interpretation is less acceptable or preferred. In these contexts, the postverbal NPs are the O arguments of these verbs.
37). a. 小明入吃間房做野。
Siuhmihng yahp-jó gó gāan fōng jouh-yeh.
'Siuming has entered that room to work.'

b. 佢出吃飯棟大厦吸煙。
Kéuih chēut-jó gó dohng daihah kāpyīm.
'S/he came out of/ exited the building to smoke.'

The tests also indicate that simple verbs like sihk ‘to eat’ with an object of location are used transitively. The following sentence provides such an example:

38). 佢食過飯間酒樓好多次。
Kéuih sihk-gwo gó gāan jāulauh hóudō chi.
'S/he has eaten at that restaurant many times.'

The second type of verb is the LV. LVs are verbs of posture that take bare NPs denoting locations. We have tested two verbs that belong to this category: choh ‘to sit’ and fan ‘to sleep’. The results suggest that both verbs are transitive. Though locations are often marked by prepositions, the tests indicate that the bare NPs in this construction are O arguments.

39). a. 你坐吃張癲成日。
Léih choh-jó gó jēung dang sēhng yaht.
'You sat on that chair for the whole day.'
The last type of verb we tested was the AOVs. In this dissertation, we focused our study on three subtypes: (1) Adverbial objects that indicate the number of times an action is performed, (2) Adverbial objects that indicate a time expression, and (3) Adverbial objects that indicate a distance. Four verbs were tested, and they are kat ‘to cough’, gáaihsík ‘to explain’, jyuh ‘to live’ and pau ‘to run’. Here are sample sentences with these verbs.

40). Adverbial object that indicates the number of times an action is performed (AOV1):

a. 我 今日 咳 吃 兩 声。
Ngóh gāmyaht kāt-jó léuhng sèng.
1ST SG today cough-PFT two sound
‘I coughed a bit today.’ (lit. ‘I cough twice today.’)

b. 他对 吃 三次 是 我 听。
Kéuih gáaihsík-jó sāam chi bèi ngóh tèng.
3RD SG explain-PFT three times to 1ST SG listen
‘S/he has already explained (it) three times to me.’

c. Adverbial object that indicates a time expression (AOV2):

你住 在 这 前 六 年 喊 吗。
Léihdeilh háidouh jyuh-jó luhk lihn la wo.
2ND PL here live-PFT six years PRT PRT.
‘You have lived here for six years.’
d. *Adverbial object that indicates a distance (AOV3)*:

阿哥 聽日 會 跑 二十 里。
Agō tingyaht wūih páu yihsaḥp léih.
Elder brother tomorrow will run twenty miles
‘(My) elder brother will run twenty miles tomorrow.’

The results show that all four of these verbs are transitive. The postverbal NPs, whether they denote the number of times an action is performed, indicate a time expression, or indicate distance, are O arguments of their verbs.

These tests, I believe, have helped to clarify the notion of transitivity in Cantonese. It was shown that merely having a postverbal NP immediately following the verb is not a good criterion to call a verb transitive. As we concluded, some postverbal NPs are oblique NPs, and therefore the sentences are intransitive. We need to go beyond the word order of Cantonese to identify the transitivity of verbs.

In the next chapter we will study some other problematic constructions that have long been regarded as controversial. These constructions include the passive construction, the *jeung* construction, VO compounds and the coverb construction.
Chapter 5

Syntactic Transitivity II

5.1 BACKGROUND

In the previous chapter, we examined three different constructions that often create controversies in terms of identifying their transitivity. In this chapter we will focus on some other constructions that have received much attention in the Chinese linguistic literature. We will focus our discussion on four different constructions: the *bēi* construction, the *jēung* construction (the Cantonese counterpart of the *ba* construction in Mandarin), VO compounds and the coverb construction. For each of these constructions, various opinions have been given as to whether they are transitive or intransitive. In this chapter, we will attempt to draw our conclusions based on syntactic facts. Once again, as we have done in Chapter four, we will employ different tests to examine these constructions.

5.2 THE PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION

Passivization has long been regarded as a syntactic process that applies to transitive sentences, which changes the mapping between verbal arguments and their grammatical relations in a sentence. Generally speaking, the process involves promoting one of the less prominent arguments in a transitive clause to the most prominent grammatical relation, while demoting the most prominent argument in the transitive clause to an oblique NP or to zero in some cases. According to Keenan (1985: 247),
though some of the world's languages do not have a passive construction, most languages possess at least one type of passive construction.

5.2.1 Definition of Passivization

In linguistic literature, passivization is described on two different levels. On the one hand, since passivization is closely related to the mapping of argument structures in sentences, it is often described as an argument changing process on the syntactic level. Many theories have mechanisms to explain this phenomenon. On the other hand, passivization is also seen as a functional phenomenon governed by pragmatic factors, such as topicality, politeness, etc. Hence, it serves as an important device in natural conversation from a functional point of view. In this dissertation, our discussions will be focused on the syntactic level, because this is where the notion of transitivity encounters its greatest challenges.

On the syntactic level, many theories have explained this construction. In Relational Grammar (RG), which was developed by Perlmutter and Postal (1983), passivization involves the reorganization of grammatical relations from one stratum to another stratum. More precisely, the grammatical relation that bears the 2-relation in a stratum becomes the 1-relation in the following stratum. The 1 label is reserved for the subject relation (or in this dissertation A or S argument) and 2 is used for the object relation (or the O argument in this dissertation). Two universals of passivization are formulated (Perlmutter and Postal 1983: 9):

(1) The direct object of a transitive clause (the O argument) is the (superficial) subject (the S argument) of the ‘corresponding’ passive.
(2) The subject of an active clause (the A argument) is neither the (superficial) subject (the S argument) nor the (superficial) direct object (the O argument) of the 'corresponding' passive.

The I-relation in the first stratum, as suggested in RG, becomes a chomeur (lit. 'unemployed'). It can be realized as an oblique NP, or it can simply be ‘unspecified’ or ‘silent’.

In the classic version of the Government-Binding (GB) theory, passivization is a type of transformation that changes an underlying active sentence into a surface passive sentence. More specifically, the transformation is triggered by a change in verb morphology. The change causes the verb to lose its ability to assign the accusative case to the object position (where the O argument should be), and the verb also loses its ability to assign the agent role to the subject position (where the A or S is found). Due to the absorption of the agent role, the original subject (the A or S argument) can no longer be there. The O argument, however, must move to the subject position to receive its case.

The passive construction is described as a valency-changing device by Dixon and Aikhenvald (Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000). What this means is that a passive sentence always has one less core argument than its active counterpart. Comrie (1989) also notes that the derived subject (the A or S argument after passivization) inherits all the syntactic properties associated with the original subject (the A argument before passivization), which includes case marking, verb agreement, control of coordination, etc.
From the discussion so far, we can conclude that the definition of the passive construction can be made into a list of properties. A typical passive construction has the following properties:

1. A passive sentence is derived from an active counterpart.
2. The subject of a passive sentence (the A or S argument) is the (direct) object (the O argument) of the active counterpart.
3. The original subject (the A argument before passivization) is marked either by an oblique case, or it is omitted entirely.
4. A reduction in valency. (If the active sentence is transitive, the passive counterpart will be intransitive; if the active sentence is ditransitive, the passive counterpart will be transitive.)
5. There is a change in morphology.
6. Syntactically, the derived subject (the A or S after passivization) is treated the same as the original subject (the A or S before passivization).

5.2.2 Passivization in Mandarin and Cantonese

In the section above, the formal properties of passivization were reviewed. These will now be used to compare the passive construction in Mandarin and Cantonese.

In Mandarin and Cantonese, the *bei* (běi in Cantonese) has long been regarded as a passive construction. Structurally, the *běi* constructions in Mandarin and Cantonese both have this pattern:

3). NP (theme) - *běi* - (NP (agent)) - verb
Here are two examples each from Mandarin and Cantonese:

4). Mandarin

a. 今天 我 哥哥 被 老闆 開除了。
   Jintian wo gege bei laoban kaichu-le.
   ‘Today my elder brother was fired by the owner.’

b. 你的 花瓶 被 他 打破了。
   Ni de huaping bei ta dapo-le.
   ‘Your vase was broken by him/her.’

5). Cantonese

a. 今日 我 阿哥 界 老闆 炒吐。
   Gāmyaht ngóh agō bei lóubán cháu-jó.
   ‘Today my elder brother was fired by the owner.’

b. 你 個 花樽 界 佢 打爛嘅。
   Léih go fājūng bei kěuíh dálāahn-jó.
   ‘Your vase was broken by him/her.’

Typically, these sentences are considered to be passive. In fact, when they are compared to the properties listed above, we may find that they are compatible with most of the characteristics of passivization. For example, all of these sentences have active counterparts (property 1):
6). a. Active counterpart of (4a)

Jintian laoban kaichu-le wo gege.
today owner fire-PFT 1ST SG elder brother
'Today the owner fired my elder brother.'

b. Active counterpart of (4b)

Ta dapo-le ni de huaping.
3RD SG break-PFT 2ND SG POSS vase
'S/he broke your vase.'

7). a. Active counterpart of (5a)

Gāmyaht lōubán cháau-jó ngōh agō.
today owner fire-PFT 1ST SG elder brother
'Today the owner fired my elder brother.'

b. Active counterpart of (5b)

Kēuih dālaahn-jó léih go fājūng.
3RD SG break-PFT 2ND SG CL vase
'S/he broke the vase.'

The S arguments in (4) and (5) (wo gege ‘my elder brother’ in (4a); ni de huaping ‘your vase’ in (4b); ngōh agō ‘my elder brother’ in (5a); léih go fājūng ‘your vase’ in (5b)) are the O arguments in (6) and (7) (property 2). The A arguments before passivization (laoban ‘owner’ in (6a); ta ‘s/he’ in (6b); lōubán ‘owner’ in (7a); kēuih ‘s/he’ in (7b)) are accompanied by the marker bei and bēi. (property 3). Also, the A NPs in (6) and (7) control coordination. Let’s take (6a) and (7a) as examples.
In both (8a) and (8b), the gaps in the second clauses correspond to the A arguments. The O arguments, and the possessors within the possessive NPs cannot be the antecedents of the gaps in the second clauses. These examples show that the A argument controls coordination in active sentences. When (6) and (7) are passivized, it is the S argument that inherits the ability to control coordination. Let’s use (4a) and (5a) as examples:
9. a. (4a) in the coordination pattern

```
今天 我 哥哥 被 老闆 解除了， 現在
today 1st SG elder brother be owner fire-PFT now

還是 悶悶不樂。
haishi menmenbule.

‘Today my elder brother was fired by the owner, and now is still in distress.’
```

b. (5a) in the coordination pattern

```
今日 我 阿哥 弟 老闆 炒走， 跟住
today 1st SG elder brother be owner fire-PFT then

又 唔見咗 個 銀包。
yauh mhginjo go ngahnbau.

‘Today my elder brother was fired by the owner, then lost his wallet.’
```

The examples above indicate that the S arguments in the bei sentences can control coordination, which is a confirmation of property 6.

The properties of the bei construction are no doubt very similar to the properties of passivization. However, some Chinese linguists continue to argue that the bei construction is no more than a combination of two verbs in a sentence (serial verb construction or SVC). Schematically, the bei construction does resemble the common SVC:

Repeated from (3):

3). NP (theme) - bei - (NP (agent)) - verb
Common SVCs

10).

a. NP₁ - V - (NP₂) - V - (NP₃)

b. 我等你吃饭。
Ngôh dàng léih sink faahn.
1<sup>st</sup> SG wait 2<sup>nd</sup> SG eat rice
'I wait for you to eat.'

In addition to the similarity between the structures of the běi construction and the SVC construction, there are other problems that Chinese linguists have put forth to refute the passive analysis of the běi construction. Hashimoto (1987), one of the scholars who rejects the passive analysis of the běi construction, shows that there are three main problems with this analysis. First, there is a small number of běi sentences that have no corresponding active counterparts. For example:

11). a. Passive Sentence (data in Mandarin)

我被他从身上偷了手表。
Wo bei ta cong shen shang tou le shoubiao.
1<sup>st</sup> SG bei 3<sup>rd</sup> SG LOC body on steal PFT watch
'My watch was stolen by him/her from my body.' (Lit: 'I was robbed by him/her from my body of my watch.')

b. Active Counterpart

他从我身上偷了我的手表。
Ta cong wo shen shang tou le (wo de) shoubiao.
3<sup>rd</sup> SG LOC 1<sup>st</sup> SG body on steal PFT (1<sup>st</sup> SG POSS) watch
'S/he stole my watch from my body.'
c. Passivizing (11b)

(11b) is the closest active counterpart of (11a). Yet, Hashimoto argues that the passive sentence (11a) cannot be derived from the active counterpart (11b) because the O argument of the verb "to steal" in (11b) is the whole NP "my watch". The stranded NP "I" in (11a) does not correspond to the O argument of "to steal". (11c) shows the real passive sentence of (11b), if bei is a true passive marker.

Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that the bei construction usually carries an adversative connotation (e.g. Matthew and Yip 1996: 150). It is also claimed by various theories that a passive sentence is generated from an active counterpart. If these theories are right, then it would seem to create a conceptual problem in Chinese passivization, since it is very hard to imagine why the counterpart of a normal sentence in Chinese must become adversative in meaning after passivization. Because of this, Hashimoto argues that Chinese does not have a true passive construction. He believes that the bei construction should more appropriately be considered to be an 'inflictive voice.'

Lastly, some modals, like hui 'be able to, be possible', change their meanings when they are passivized. For instance:
The meaning of *hui* changes from ‘be able’ to ‘be possible’ in (12). Again, Hashimoto argues that if the *bēi* construction is a true passive construction, then the meaning of the modal *hui* should not change at all. Therefore, he believes that the *bēi* construction does not passivize an active sentence. Rather, he suggests that the word *bēi* should be considered to be a transitive verb with an adversative connotation.

Though the arguments stated by Hashimoto have been used in connection with Mandarin, we can easily use the same arguments for Cantonese. Thus, should the *bēi* construction be considered to be a passive construction? Or is it a transitive serial verb construction that takes an agent NP as its complement? This is exactly what we want to study in this dissertation. There are two different ways to seek the answer. First, if *bēi* is a verb, we would expect it to take aspect markers, and to be involved in the V-not-V question formation. Thus, we can test to see if the *bēi* construction allows these constructions to happen. Second, we can use the tests we introduced in Chapter four to see if the NP following *bēi* is a core argument or an oblique NP. If it is a core argument, then *bēi* should be a real verb, and the *bēi* construction is a transitive sentence. If the NP is an oblique, then *bēi* can either be an intransitive verb taking an oblique NP as it
complement, or the whole phrase can be an oblique phrase. In the remaining part of our
discussion of the bèi construction, we will do just that.

5.2.2.1 TESTING THE VERBHOOD OF BÈI

One of the ways to see if bèi is a true verb is to test its ability to take aspect
markers. It is expected that verbs should occur with different tenses/aspects. Compare:

13). Regular SVC

我 等緊 你 食飯。
Ngóh dāng-gán léih sihk faahn.
1ST SG wait-PROG 2ND SG eat rice
‘I am waiting for you to eat.’

14). The bèi construction

a.*我 等緊 佢 打 一 下。
*Ngóh bèi-jò kéuih dá yāt háh.
1ST SG bèi-PFT 3RD SG hit one time.
‘I was hit once by him.’

b.*阿哥 等緊 老闆 鬧。
*Ago bèi-gán loubán láuh.
elder brother bèi-PROG owner scold
‘(My) elder brother is being scolded by (his) owner.’

c.*呢 本書 等過 他 書。
*Ní bún syū bèi-gwo kéuih tái1.
this CT. book bèi-EXP 3RD SG read
‘This book was read by him/her.’

From the examples here, it is clearly shown that bèi cannot take any aspect marker. This
means that the bèi construction is different from regular SVCs, where aspect markers can

1 One may argue that this sentence is grammatical, but the meaning is changed to ‘As for this book,
(someone) has given it to him to read’. It happens that bèi in Cantonese is homophonous to the verb ‘to
give’. So this sentence can be interpreted as an active sentence.
be attached to the first verb in the series (13). This finding casts some doubt on the validity of the ‘transitive verb’ analysis.

Some linguists may argue that the use of aspect markers is not a good test to show *bêi*’s verbhood, because there are other verbs, like the copular *haih*, which cannot take any aspect marker. Since the aspect marker test may be invalid, we need to find more independent evidence to support either the passive analysis or the ‘transitive verb’ analysis. Another characteristic of verbs is that they can form a V-not-V question. V-not-V questions are the most neutral form of yes/no questions in Cantonese (Matthews and Yip 1996). Here are two examples of how V-not-V questions:

15). a. 你哋去唔去美國呀?
    Léihdeih heui-mh-heui Méihgwok a?
    2nd PL go-not-go America PRT
    ‘Are you going to America?’

    b. 我係唔係好靚呀?
    Ngôh haih-mh-haih hóu leng a?
    1st SG COP-not-COP very pretty PRT
    ‘Am I very pretty?’

The verb *heui* ‘to go’ is reduplicated and *mh* ‘not’ is added in between them. Interesting, the copular *haih*, which cannot take any aspect marker, can be reduplicated to form V-not-V questions. If *bêi* is a verb, then we can expect it to undergo this question formation process. But if it cannot appear in the V-not-V construction, then it does not behave like a verb.
16). *Regular SVC*

我 等唔等 你 飯 飯 呀?

Regular SVCs are capable of having the first verb undergo the V-not-V question formation (16). In (17), these two *béi* sentences are capable of undergoing the question formation process. However, the meanings of these sentences are no longer passive. The homophonous verb *béi* 'to give, to let' takes over the meanings. The results show that the passive *béi* cannot form any V-not-V question, and it does not behave like a verb. This confirms the results we got from the aspect marker test for verbhood.

17). a. '阿哥 等唔等 老闆 鬧 呀?

Should I wait for you to eat?'

阿哥 老闆 鬧 呀?

'Was my brother scolded by the owner?'

b. 呢 本 書 等唔等 佢 睇 呀?

As for this book, should (someone) give (permission) to him to read?'

běi-mh-béi lóubán láuh a?.

elder brother béi-not-béi owner scold PRT

* 'Was my brother scolded by the owner?'

'Did my brother give (permission) to the owner to scold him?'

* 'Was the book read by him?'

'As for this book, should (someone) give (permission) to him to read?'

Regular SVCs are capable of having the first verb undergo the V-not-V question formation (16). In (17), these two *béi* sentences are capable of undergoing the question formation process. However, the meanings of these sentences are no longer passive. The homophonous verb *béi* 'to give, to let' takes over the meanings. The results show that the passive *béi* cannot form any V-not-V question, and it does not behave like a verb. This confirms the results we got from the aspect marker test for verbhood.

5.2.2.2 TESTING THE NP

Besides testing the verbhood of *béi*, we can also look at the status of the NP following *béi*. The assumption is, that if *béi* is a transitive verb, as Hashimoto claimed, then the NP following *béi* should be an O argument. On the other hand, if *béi* is not a verb but a passive marker, then the NP should behave like an oblique NP. In this section,
we will once again employ the tests that we introduced in Chapter four to identify the category of this NP.

The first test is relativization. As seen in Chapter four, in Cantonese, if a NP is a core argument, relativization should make use of the gap strategy. But if a NP is oblique, then relativization should involve the pronoun (retention) strategy. Here are a regular SVC sentence and two sentences with bei:

18). 小明 煮 龍蝦 界 我 食。
Siuhmihng jyú luhnghā bei ngōh sihk.
‘Siuming cooked a lobster for me to eat.’

19). a. 蘋果 界 小朋友 食咗。
Di pihnggwō bei di stupaahngyáuh sihk-jó.
‘The apples were eaten by the children.’

b. 我 錢 界 好 好 好吃。
Ngōh dī chin bei gō bāan yāhn ngāak-jó.
‘My money was cheated away by those people.’

Let’s see how they respond to relativization.

20). RC of (18)

[SI Siuhmihng jyú ___/* kēuih bei ngōh sihk] gō jek
Siuming cook ___/* 3RD SG for 1ST SG eat that CL.

龍蝦 虧 新鮮。
luhnghā hōu sānsīn.
‘The lobster that Siuming cooked for me to eat is very fresh.’
21). a. RC of (19a)

小朋友 嘴 出面 玩緊。
siupahngyáuh hái chēutbihn wáan-gán.
children LOC outside play-PROG
‘The children by whom the apples were eaten are playing outside.’

b. RC of (19b)

斑 人 係 我 阿哥 嘅 朋友。
bān yáhn haih ngóh agō dī pahngyáuh.
CL people COP 1ST SG elder brother CL friend
‘The people by whom my money was cheated away are my elder brother’s friends.’

For comparison purposes, a regular SVC sentence (18) is relativized. It is found that the gap strategy is used for SVCs. However, the béi construction is different. The results from relativization are clear. Both sentences in (21) lead us to one conclusion: the NPs following béi are not O arguments. They are oblique NPs. Though both acceptable sentences require much effort to process (complex relative clauses rarely occur), there is no hesitation in labeling the sentences with the gap strategy ungrammatical. The gap strategy is clearly wrong in these sentences. So according to relativization, béi should not be a transitive verb. It should be a passive marker.

The second test we used in Chapter four was the verbal particle saai ‘all’. If béi is a transitive verb, then saai should follow after béi, and it should quantify the NP
following běi. If běi is not a verb, having saai after it will not make sense. In that case, saai should follow the only verb in the sentence, and it should quantify the first NP in the sentence (the S argument).

22). Putting saai after the first verb in a SVC sentence

Siuming jyú saai dī luḥngḥā běi ngōh sihk.
Siuming cook all CL lobster for 1st SG eat
‘Siuming cooked all the lobsters for me to eat.’

23). Putting saai after běi

a. saai in (19a)

Di pihnggwō běi saai dī sfupaḥngyáuh sihk-jō.
CL apple běi all CL children eat-PFT
* ‘The apples were eaten by all the children.’
   ‘As for the apples, (someone) gave them all to the children, and they ate them.’

b. saai in (19b)

Ngōh dī chin běi saai gó bāan yāhn ngāak-jō.
1st SG CL money běi all that CL people cheat-PFT
* ‘My money was cheated away by all those people.’
  ‘I gave all my money to those people, and they cheated(?)’

(22) shows that when saai is added to the first verb in a SVC, it can quantify the O argument of the verb. The sentences in (23) indicate one thing: saai ‘all’ cannot quantify the NP after běi if the passive connotation is to be retained. They may make some sense only if běi is interpreted to be ‘to give’ (see footnote 1 in this chapter).
Interestingly, *saai* can quantify the first NPs in (23) (*dì pihnggwó ‘the apple’ in (23a); *ngōh dī chin ‘my money’ in (23b)). This is because these NPs can be interpreted as the topics of the sentences, which are fronted from the O argument positions of the verb *bēi ‘to give’. So (23a) and (23b) are not intransitive sentences when the verb *bēi* means ‘to give’. Moreover, for (23b), even with the meaning ‘to give’, the sentence is odd semantically. But if *saai* appears after the lexicalized verb in (19), it can quantify the first NPs in the sentences, and the passive connotation can be retained.

24). a. 當 蘋果 看 小朋友 食 暗。

*Dì pihnggwó bēi dī siupahngyáuh sihk saai.*

CL apple bēi CL children eat all

‘All the apples were eaten by the children.’

b. 我 的 錢 看 喂 班 人 嚇 暗。

*Ngōh dī chin bēi gó bāan yàhn ngāak saai.*

1*ST* SG CL money bēi that CL people cheat all

‘All my money was cheated away by those people.’

These two sentences suggest that the NP following *bēi* is not the O argument of *bēi*, and that the first NP has to be the S argument in these sentences. The particle *saai* test shows that *bēi* is not a transitive verb. It is just a passive marker.

The last test used in Chapter four was the *màaih* test. *Màaih ‘along, in addition’ has the same syntax as the particle *saai*. It modifies either the O argument or the S argument. Like *saai*, *màaih* is found after the verb of a sentence. So if *bēi* is a transitive verb, *màaih* should follow *bēi* and it should modify the NP after *bēi*. But if *bēi* is not a verb, then *màaih* should be found after the real verb in the *bēi* sentence and it should modify the first NP in the sentence. Here are the relevant examples.
25). Putting màaih after an SVC

小明 煮 烤 龍蝦 界 我 食。
Siuming jỳu màaih dì luńghâ bèi ngóh sihk.
'Siuming cooked the lobsters for me to eat, (in addition to other food).'

26). Putting màaih after bèi

a. (19a)

昨 蘋果 留 烤 邻小朋友试 食啦。
Dì pihnggwó bèi màaih dì siupahngyáuh sihk-jó.
CL apple bèi VPRT CL children eat-PFT
*‘Even the apples were eaten by the children.’
‘(Someone) even gave the apples to the children to eat.’

b. (19b)

我 昨 錢 留 嘗 班人 吃啦。
Ngóh dì chin bèi màaih gó bāan yáhn ngāak-jó.
1ST SG CL money bèi VPRT that CL people cheat-PFT
*‘Even my money was cheated away by those people.’
‘(I) even gave my money to those people to cheat (?)’

(25) indicates that màaih can quantify the O argument of the first verb in an SVC. The meaning is that in addition to cooking other food, Siuming also makes lobsters. Now turn to (26), we find similar results to the saai test, that màaih ‘along with, in addition’ cannot modify the NP following bèi. It, however, modifies the first NPs in (26a) and (26b). The explanation is the same as we had for the saai test. To make sense out of (26), bèi must be interpreted as the verb ‘to give’. In this way, the passive connotation is lost. The first NPs in (26) are interpreted as the topics of the sentences, and they originate from the O argument positions of the verb bèi. Therefore, màaih can modify the first NPs in (26). In
order to have both the passive connotation and the $màaih$ particle, $màaih$ must appear after the verbs *sihk* 'to eat' in (19a) and *ngāak* 'to cheat' in (19b).

27). a. 閣 蘋果 留 小朋友 食 埋。

$Dī$ pihnggwó $bēi$ $dí$ siupahngyáu $sikh$ $màaih$.  
*CL apple CL children eat VPRT*  
‘Even the apples were eaten by the children.’

b. 我 閣 錢 留 班 人 呃 埋。

$Ngōh$ $dí$ chin $bēi$ go $bāan$ yāhn $ngāak$ $màaih$.  
*$1^o$ SG CL money CL people cheat VPRT*  
‘Even my money was cheated away by those people.’

From the three tests we have used, we believe that it is quite safe to claim that *bēi* is not a transitive verb, and thus the *bēi* construction is not an SVC. It is shown that the NP following *bēi* (when it does not mean ‘to give’) must be an oblique NP, which makes *bēi* a possible candidate to be a passive marker in Cantonese.

In fact, there is another test which we did not use in Chapter four, which can help reveal if the NP following *bēi* is an O argument or an oblique NP. It is the depictive predicate test. Depictive predicates are a special type of postnominal adjective which can be associated with certain arguments in a dyadic verb. In English, they can be associated with S, A or O arguments. For example:

28). a. The woman saw the man drunk.

b. The woman talked to the man drunk.

Example (28a) is ambiguous in meaning. On the one hand, the depictive predicate may modify the A argument, giving the interpretation that the woman who saw the man
drunk. On the other hand, the predicate may also be associated with the O argument, and have the meaning that the man whom the woman saw was drunk. In (28b), however, there is no ambiguity in its interpretation. The depictive predicate can only be related to the S argument ‘the woman’ but not the oblique NP ‘the man’. As suggested by the examples, depictive predicates can be associated with the core arguments in a sentence, but not with oblique noun phrases. When the test is applied to Cantonese, a similar situation is also found. Let us consider the following example:

29). a. 個 男人 唔小心 撞到 個 BB 呔咗。
   Go námyámn mhsíusám johng-dóu go bihbí wáhn-jó.
   CL man accidentally knock-VPRT CL baby faint-PFT
   ‘The man accidentally knocked the baby out.’

   b. 個 BB 唔小心 撞到 呔咗。
   Go bihbí mhsíusám johng-dóu wáhn-jó.
   CL baby accidentally knock-VPRT faint-PFT
   ‘The baby accidentally knocked (himself) out.’

In the first example above the depictive predicate associates its meaning with the O argument bihbí ‘baby’ (29a). Therefore, the sentence is interpreted as ‘The man knocked the baby and the baby fainted.’ In (29b) the S argument bihbí ‘baby’ is associated with the depictive predicate, and so the sentence can only be interpreted as ‘the baby fainted’. According to our generalization about depictive predicates, they should not be associated with peripheral arguments (oblique NPs). This generalization seems to hold true in Cantonese.
30). 架車撞停車場撞到爛嘅。
Ga chē hái tiāngchēcheuhung johng-dóu lahn-jó.
CL car LOC parking lot knock-VPT broken-PFT
'The car knocked (into something) and got broken at the parking lot.' (Lit. 'The car knocked (itself) broken at the parking lot.'

In this sentence, the meaning of the depictive predicate *lahn* ‘to be broken’ is associated with the noun phrase *chē* ‘the car’, which is the S argument. Therefore, the car is the one which was broken because of the impact. However, the meaning cannot be associated with the locative NP *tiāngchēcheuhung* ‘parking lot’. Though the parking lot may suffer some destruction, the meaning is not implied in the sentence. This sentence, along with the sentences in (29), shows us that depictive predicates can only associate their meanings with S or O arguments in Cantonese. They can never modify an oblique NP.

If we apply this test to a *bēi* sentence, this is what we observe:

31). 個男人唔小心畀個BB撞到
Go nāhmyāhn mhsǐusām bēi go bihbī johng-dóu
CL man accidentally bēi CL baby knock-VPT

wāhn-jó.
faint-PFT
'The man was accidentally knocked faint by the baby.'

In (31), the one who was hit and fainted was the man. The depictive predicate *wāhn* ‘faint’ can never be associated with the NP following *bēi*. What it shows is that the NP is not a core argument. The only core argument of this sentence is *go nāhmyāhn* ‘the man’, which makes it the single core argument in the sentence (S). The depictive predicate test
concurs with the findings from the previous tests. It shows that béi marks an oblique agent NP. Needless to say, the interpretation is somewhat strange, since according to our knowledge about reality, it is very unlikely for a baby to knock a man so hard that he faints, but the syntax leaves us no choice but to interpret the sentence in this odd way.

5.3 **THE JEUNG CONSTRUCTION**

One of the most discussed topics in Chinese linguistics is probably the *ba* construction in Mandarin. The equivalent in Cantonese is the *jeung* construction. *Ba* and *jeung* (in Mandarin it is pronounced *jiang*) share the same historical development. Both were used exclusively as verbs with the meanings of ‘to take’ or ‘to hold’. (For more discussion and examples on *ba* and *jeung*, see Hwang 1999). Over a long period of time, these two words lost their original meanings, and their current usages have been widely discussed by Chinese linguists. Both words are used in Cantonese and Mandarin, but there is a difference in preference. For Cantonese speakers, *jeung* is widely used in everyday conversations. *Ba*, on the other hand, is regarded as bookish and is rarely used in any situation besides formal writings. For Mandarin speakers, however, the situation is reversed. *Ba* has completely replaced *jeung* as a spoken form, but may exist in the written language as a classical style. Basically, the syntax of *ba* and *jeung* is almost the same, and therefore the discussions on *ba* in Mandarin can easily be translated as *jeung*.

The *ba* construction and the *jeung* construction have the following schematic structure:

32). *Structure of the ba (jeung) construction*

\[
\text{NP}_1 - \text{ba (jeung)} - \text{NP}_2 - \text{V} - (\text{NP}_3)
\]
33). a. **Mandarin**

我 把 那 本 書 放 在 桌子 上。
Wo ba na ben shu fang zai zhuozi shang.
1\textsuperscript{st} SG ba that CL book place LOC table on
'I placed that book on the table.'

b. **Cantonese**

我 將 那 本 書 放 嘅 檯 上面。
Ngoh jëung go bún syū fong hái tòi seuhungmihn.
1\textsuperscript{st} SG jëung that CL book place LOC table on
'I placed that book on the table.'

*Ba* (and *jëung*) has been given many names based on different analyses. Frei (1956) connects the use of *ba* with ergativity, claiming that *ba* is used only with O or S arguments. Wang (1947) calls the *ba* construction the disposal form, in which he claims that the NP marked by *ba* ‘states how a person is handled, manipulated, or dealt with; how something is disposed of; or how an affair is conducted’ (Wang 1947:161). Chao calls this construction a pretransitive construction, which he describes as a kind of serial verb construction. Li and Thompson (1974) suggest that *ba* can be interpreted as the first verb in a serial verb construction, or as a preposition/object marker. Hopper and Thompson (1980) state that the *ba* construction has the effect of fronting the O argument and it is associated with high transitivity.

As we have seen above, the *ba* (jëung) construction has been analyzed from many different angles. If we think carefully, each of these characterizations mentioned above entail different views on the transitivity of the *ba* construction. For some linguists, *ba* is an object marker and it fronts the O argument of a transitive sentence. For example (in Cantonese):
34). a. A transitive sentence

Keuih sikh-jó n.go go mihn.
3⁵ SG eat-PFT 1⁵ SG CL noodle
'S/he ate my noodles.'

b. The jeung construction of (34a)

Keuih jeung n.go go mihn sikh-jó
3⁵ SG jeung 1⁵ SG CL noodle eat-PFT
'S/he ate my noodles.'

If jeung (ba) is an object marker, it is suggested that the NP fronted by ba remains as the O argument of the verb sikh ‘to eat’. Therefore, the jeung sentence should be transitive. This idea also entails that jeung changes the word order from SVO to SOV. In contrast, if we accept the serial verb construction analysis as the right one, then the jeung marked NP must be the O argument of both jeung and sikh ‘to eat’. Furthermore, if we take the approach that jeung is a preposition, then the NP it marks should be an oblique NP, and the sentence should be an intransitive one (SV).

So what is the transitivity of the jeung (ba) construction? Is the NP marked by jeung a core argument, or is it an oblique NP? Does the jeung construction change the word order of the sentence? It would be very interesting to test the verbhood of jeung and the jeung marked NP. If the results show that the NP is a core argument, and that jeung is no longer a verb, then the jeung construction should be considered to be a transitive sentence with jeung as an object marker. If the NP is found to be an oblique
NP, then the *jiung construction is just an intransitive pattern with *jiung as a preposition of some sort. In the following section, we will put the *jiung construction to the tests.

### 5.3.1 Testing the Verbhood of *jeung

As we discussed when considering the verbhood of *bei, it was mentioned that verbs should be able to take aspect markers. So one of the ways to test the verbhood of *jeung is to put an aspect marker with it.

35). **Regular SVC**

> kéuih heui-jó hohkháuh wán pahngyáuh.
> 3SG go-PFT school look for friend
> ‘S/he went to school to look for someone.’

36). a.*léih *jeung-jó gó bún syū chāau yāt chi.
> 2SG jëung-PFT that CL book copy one time.
> ‘You copied that book once.’

b.*nghódeih *jeung-gan dī wái páih hóu.
> 1PL jëung-PROG CL seat line up nicely
> ‘We are lining up the seats nicely.’

The first verb in a regular SVC can take an aspect marker, as shown in (35). However, the aspect marker test shows that *jeung cannot take any aspect marker, and thus *jeung should not be a verb.

Another way to test *jeung’s verbhood is to see if it can engage in the V-not-V question formation. Regular verbs, the copular *haih, and SVCs can form questions with the V-not-V form.
(37a), (37b) and (37c) show that verbs have the ability to turn into the V-not-V form when they are used in a question. But in (37d), jēung cannot engage in this kind of question formation. This suggests that jēung should not be a verb.

Although we have shown that jēung is not a verb, there still remain questions to be answered. Is the NP marked by jēung a core argument, in which case the jēung is a transitive sentence; or is the NP an oblique NP, and the sentence is intransitive? This question will be answered in the next section.
5.3.2 Testing the NP

In this section we want to once again use the tests that we introduced in Chapter four to investigate whether the jeung marked NP is a core argument or an oblique NP.

The first test is the relativization test. Here are a regular SVC sentence and two jeung sentences before relativization.

38). Regular SVC

但去學校 捕 朋友。
Kéuih heui hokkháuh wán pahngyáuh.
3rd SG go school look for friend
’S/he went to school to look for friends.’

39). a. 我 將 錢 放 人 銀行 裏面。
Ngóh jeung dí chin fong-jó hái ngahnhohng léuihmihn.
1st SG jeung CL money put-PFT LOC bank inside
‘I put the money in the bank’

b. 但 將 門 開啓。
Kéuih jeung douh muhn hōi-jó.
3rd SG jeung CL door open-PFT
’S/he opened the door.’

40). RC of (38)

但去 ___/ * 目 度 捕 朋友 目
[Rel Kéuih heui ___/ * gó douh wán pahngyáuh] gó
3rd SG go ___/ * LOC there look for friend that

間 學校 好 大。
gaan hokkháuh hóu daaih.
CL school very big
‘The school where s/he went to look for friends is big.’
41). a. RC of (39a)

我 将 *___*/*_併 放咁 贷 銀行
[rel Ngóh jëung *____*/*kéuih fong-jó hái ngahlhohang
1SG jëung *____*/*3SG put-PFT LOC bank

裏面 嘀 錢 係 為咗 買 廣 用 嘢。
léuihmihn] dī chin haí wái jó màaih úk yuhng ge.
inside CL money COP for buy house use PRT

'The money that I put in the bank is to buy a house.'

b. RC of (39b)

併 將 *___*/*_併 開咁 度 門 係
[rel kéuih jëung *____*/*kéuih hói-jó] douh muhn haí
3SG jëung *____*/*3SG open-PFT CL door COP

紅色 嘢。
huhngsík ge.
red PRT

'The door that s/he opened is red.'

The gap strategy is used when the NP after the first verb in a SVC is relativized. But the results are different in the case of the jëung construction. Neither example in (41) is acceptable. That is, it is not possible to relativize the NP that jëung marks. Since neither strategy for relativization is allowed, the relativization test does not give us a conclusive answer to our question. We need to use other tests to examine the status of the jëung marked NP.

Our second test involves the particle saai, which quantifies the S argument or the O argument. If the jëung marked NP is a core argument, it should be able to be quantified.
42). *Putting saai with an SVC*

但去晒的学校探朋友。
Kēuǐh heui saai dī hohkhâu rh wän pahngyáuह。
3SG go all CL school look for friend
‘S/he went to all the schools to look for friends.’

43). *Putting saai with the jëung sentences*

a. 我將的錢界晒有需要嘅人。
Ngōhdeih jëung dī chin běi saai yûhsûiyiu ge yàhn.
1PL jëung CL money give all needed POSS people
‘We gave all the money to the needed.’

b. 佢將的答背晒。
Kēuihdeih jëung dī dapngon bûi saai.
3PL jëung CL answer memorize all
‘They memorized all the answers.’

The *saai* test reveals that *saai* can quantify the NP of the first verb in a regular SVC. As for the *jëung* sentences, *saai* quantifies not the first NPs, but the *jëung* marked NPs. In both sentences there is no other way to interpret them. Thus, from this test we have to conclude that the *jëung* marked NP is a core argument. More specifically, it is the O argument of a *jëung* sentence.

The third test involves the particle *màaih*. Similar to *saai*, it modifies the S argument or the O argument. We can use this to distinguish a core argument from an oblique NP.
44). *Putting màaih with an SVC*

![Translation and Analysis Here]

45). *Putting màaih with the jēung sentences*

a. 你 將 衣 衫 都 洗 埋。
Léih jēung dī sāam dōu sāi màaih.
2nd SG jēung CL clothes also wash VPRT
You even wash the clothes.’

b. 佢 將 功課 都 做 埋。
Kéuih jēung dī gōngfo dōu jouh màaih.
3rd SG jēung CL homework also do VPRT
’S/he even finished doing the homework.’

Màaih in (44) modifies the NP dī hohkāuh ‘the schools’, the argument of the first verb heui ‘to go’. Both sentences in (45) show that màaih modifies the NPs marked by jēung. In (45a), for example, the sentence bears the meaning of ‘in addition to doing many other things, you also washed the clothes.’ Clearly, it is dī sāam ‘the clothes’ that màaih modifies. So the particle màaih indicates that the jēung marked NP is a core argument, and we should therefore interpret it as the O argument of the jēung construction.

The last test that we can use is the depictive predicate test. It was shown in the passive section that depictive predicates modify the S argument or the O argument in Cantonese. If depictive predicates can also modify the jēung marked NP, it will then confirm the results that we found in the two previous tests.
From the meanings of (46a) and (46b), we can see that the depictive predicates are associated with the jeung marked NPs in their respective sentences. (46b), for example, means that di sihmat ‘the food’ becomes black from burning too much. It is not kèuih ‘s/he’ that turns black. The results of this test once again concur with the results from the saai test and the màaih test. Though we did not receive conclusive results from relativization, the other three tests overwhelmingly indicate that the jeung marked NP must be a core argument. Since the jeung construction has the ‘NP1 - jeung - NP2 - V - (NP3)’ structure, we would like to claim that the jeung marked NP has to be the O argument of this construction. The results also imply that jeung is not a preposition. It is just an object marker, which in turn entails that the jeung construction is a transitive pattern.
5.4 VO COMPONDS

Compounding is a very productive process for forming nouns, adjectives and even verbs in Chinese. A compound, in a very broad sense, is defined as a 'word which consists of two or more words' (Fabb, 1988). On the surface, this definition seems to be quite easy to interpret. Many examples can be found in English: *blackbird, boyfriend, textbook*, etc. These examples illustrate the fact that these compounds must have two smaller free morphemes. When this definition is applied to Chinese in general, one can find numerous kinds of compounds (examples in Cantonese): compound nouns (e.g. jau-dim 'hotel' (lit. wine-shop), heung-seui 'perfume' (lit. fragrant-water)), compound adjectives (e.g. hāk-sām 'malicious' (lit. black-heart), jih-sī 'selfish' (lit. self-private)), and VO compounds (e.g. haahng-lōuh 'walk' (lit. walk-road), yāuh-seui 'swim' (lit. swim-water)), etc. These examples seem to qualify as compounds because each independent morpheme carries a meaning, and the meanings of these combinations are not always predicable.

Though compounding is very productive in Chinese, it is often hard to differentiate compounds from non-compounds. Chinese linguists have not come up with clear-cut criteria to obtain satisfactory results. How do we know if a combination of V and O is truly a single unit or a temporary unit conjoined by syntax? What are some of the tests we can use to see if the 'O' morpheme behaves like an O argument? This section of the dissertation is aimed to study this phenomenon.

5.4.1 SOME PROPERTIES OF CANTONESE VO COMPONDS

Besides conjoining a verb and a noun together, there are two other properties that
are worth mentioning here. First, as noted by Matthews and Yip, the O element in VO compounds is generic or indefinite. It does not refer to any particular object in the world. For example, the noun *chē* ‘car’ in the VO compound *hoichē* ‘to start operating a car’ (lit. to open-car) does not necessarily refer to any particular car. In fact, it does not have to refer to a particular type of vehicle. The car can be a compact car, a truck, a mini-van, or even a train. This is typical for compounds in other languages as well. Fabb (1988) notes that the ‘noun in a compound will have a generic rather than a referential function’ (p. 66). This property can be seen in Nahuatl (data from Gerdts, 1988: 84).

   I-it-eat the flesh
   ‘I eat the flesh.’

   b. Ni-naca-qua.
   I-flesh-eat
   ‘I eat flesh.’

The second property is that compounding may result in creating intransitive verbs. This property is manifested in a great number of VO compounds in Cantonese.

48). 開刀
   Hōi-dōu ‘to operate on’ (lit. open-knife)

   Ja 車
   Ja-chē ‘to drive’ (lit. drive-car)

   結婚
   Git-fān ‘to marry’ (lit. tie-marriage)

   敬禮
   Geng-lái ‘to salute’ (lit. perform-salutation)
Even though the meanings of these compounds seem to require an O argument, none of them can take an independent O argument.

49). * 數生 開刀 佷。
   * Yīsāng hōi-dōu kéuih.
     doctor operate on 3rd sg
     ‘The doctor operated on him/her.’

5.4.2 Syntactic Tests

Given that these VO compounds show some similarities with typical compounds in other languages, it would be interesting to test their syntactic properties to see whether they are truly single lexical units, or whether they are just verb phrases with lexicalized meanings. Here, I will first use the tests that I introduced in Chapter four to examine some VO compounds. Later, more tests will be introduced at the appropriate time.

Six VO compounds in Cantonese chosen randomly from Matthews and Yip’s Cantonese Reference Grammar are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>Mandarin</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>食飯 Sihk-faahn</td>
<td>吃饭 Duīfůn</td>
<td>eat rice/a meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>開刀 Hōi-dōu</td>
<td>開刀 Hōi-duō</td>
<td>operate on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>擔心 Dāam-sām</td>
<td>担心 Dāam-sām</td>
<td>worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>讀書 Duhk-syū</td>
<td>閱讀 duībóu</td>
<td>study-book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>出蹓 Chēut-māau</td>
<td>出馬 Chēut-māu</td>
<td>out(exit)-cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>投資 Tāuh-jī</td>
<td>投資 duīzī</td>
<td>throw-resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘invest’</td>
<td>‘invest’</td>
<td>‘study’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘cheat’ (in examination, etc.)</td>
<td>‘invest’</td>
<td>‘invest’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first test is relativization. The assumption is that if the VO compounds are single lexical units, the O elements should not be able to undergo relativization. In contrast, if the compounds are just verb phrases, then the O element should be able to undergo relativization.

50). a. Sihk-faahn

我 同 朋友 一齊 食飯。
Ngóh tūhng pahngyāuh yātchāih sihk-faahn
1SG with friend together eat-rice
‘I ate with some friends.’

b. Duhk-syii

併 同 圖書館 一起 読書。
Kéuih hái tóuhsyūgún duhk-syii.
3SG LOC library study-book
‘S/he is studying at the library.’

c. Hōi-dōu

阿 John 依家 開刀。
Ah-John yihgā hōi-dōu.
John now operate on
‘John is performing an operation now.’

d. Chēut-māau

併 昨晚 考試 時候 出貓。
Kéuih kāhmyāh hái háusi ge sihhauh chēut-māau.
3SG yesterday LOC examination POSS time cheat
‘S/he cheated when s/he took the examination yesterday.’
e. Dāam-sām

我真係好擔心。
Ngōh jānhaī hōu dāam-sām
1ˢᵗ SG really very worry
'I am really very worried.'

f. Tāuh-jī

你同我嚟美國市場投資。
Lēih tūhng ngōh hái Méihgwok gc sīcēuhng tāuh-jī
tauh-ji 2ⁿᵈ SG for 1ˢᵗ SG LOC America POSS market invest
'You invest in the American market for me.'

51) a. RC of (50a)

我同朋友—齊食____/*佢
[rel Ngōh tūhng pahngyāuh yātchāih sihk ____/*kēuih]
1ˢᵗ SG with friend together eat ____/*3ʳᵈ SG

嘅碗/餐飯好貴。
gō wūn/chān faahn hōu gwai.
that CL/cl. rice/meal very expensive
'The rice/meal that I ate with my friends was very expensive.'

b. RC of (50b)

佢嚟圖書館讀____/*佢嚟啲
[rel Kēuih hāi tōuhsyūgūn duhk ____/*kēuih] gō dī
3ʳᵈ SG LOC library study ____/*3ʳᵈ SG that CL

書好有趣。
syū hōu yāuhschéui.
book very interesting
'The books that s/he read at the library are very interesting.'

* 'The study that s/he did at the library was very interesting.'
c. *RC of (50c)*

刀好晒精神。
dōu hōu sāi jīngsahn.
knife very spend energy.

? ‘The knife that John is opening now takes a lot of energy.’
* ‘The operation that John is performing takes a lot of energy.’

d. *RC of (50d)*

* [REL Kéuīh kāhmįyɑh tāi hāusì ge sǐhhuəh chěут 3RD SG yesterday LOC examination POSS time exit]

____/ *[REL jù John 依家 開 ____/ * 佢 槍 把/種 [REL John jī hāi ____/ * kěuīh] ɡō bá/jűng]

刀好晒精神。
dōu hōu sāi jīngsahn.
knife very spend energy.

? ‘The knife that John is opening now takes a lot of energy.’
* ‘The operation that John is performing takes a lot of energy.’

e. *RC of (50e)*

我真係好擔心 ____/ *佢 槍 個/的
[REL Ngōh jānhyāh hōu dāam ____/ * kěuīh] ɡō go/dī
1ST SG really very worry ____/ * 3RD SG that CL/CL

心已經消失咗。
sām yīgēŋ sīusāt-jō.
heart already disappear-PFT
* ‘The worry that I really had already disappeared.’
According to (51), there are three different outcomes from this test. (51a) shows that the O element in *sihk-faahn* 'eat rice/a meal' can easily be relativized. This suggests that this VO compounds is not a real VO compound. It is a verb phrase. On the other hand, the other extreme is found in (51e) and (51f), where relativization is completely blocked. The results indicate that *duam-sâm* 'worry' and *tàuh-jī* 'invest' are true VO compounds. The third type seems to be in between the other two, as we can see in (51b), (51c) and (51d). Relativization can be applied to these sentences, but the lexicalized meanings cannot be retained after relativization. One of the ways to explain this fact is to say that there are two homophonous versions of *duhk-syu* 'study', *hōi-dōu* 'operate on' and *chéut-māau* 'cheat'. The lexicalized versions are true VO compounds, which is why relativization is not allowed with that meaning. But the versions with no lexicalized meaning are verb phrases, which is why relativization can be applied. Note that for (51c) and (51d) there are question marks for the first meanings. The sentences, I believe, are grammatical in structure. However, the meanings are very strange, since no one would ever 'open a knife', or 'exit a cat'.

f. *RC of (50f)*

According to (51), there are three different outcomes from this test. (51a) shows that the O element in *sihk-faahn* 'eat rice/a meal' can easily be relativized. This suggests that this VO compounds is not a real VO compound. It is a verb phrase. On the other hand, the other extreme is found in (51e) and (51f), where relativization is completely blocked. The results indicate that *duam-sâm* 'worry' and *tàuh-jī* 'invest' are true VO compounds. The third type seems to be in between the other two, as we can see in (51b), (51c) and (51d). Relativization can be applied to these sentences, but the lexicalized meanings cannot be retained after relativization. One of the ways to explain this fact is to say that there are two homophonous versions of *duhk-syu* 'study', *hōi-dōu* 'operate on' and *chéut-māau* 'cheat'. The lexicalized versions are true VO compounds, which is why relativization is not allowed with that meaning. But the versions with no lexicalized meaning are verb phrases, which is why relativization can be applied. Note that for (51c) and (51d) there are question marks for the first meanings. The sentences, I believe, are grammatical in structure. However, the meanings are very strange, since no one would ever 'open a knife', or 'exit a cat'.
Another way to explain this fact is to suggest that these VO units have begun the process of grammaticalization, which changes them from VPs to true VO compounds. Since the process is not complete yet, these VO units behave partially like VPs and partially like VO compounds.

The second test involves the particle saai. If saai can be used to quantify the O element in a VO compound, that means the O is a real argument. If saai cannot quantify the O element, then the element is not an argument at all.

52). a. sihk-faahn

你她 應該 食晒飯 先 曉。
Lāihdeih yīnggōi sihk-saai-faun sīn làih.
2nd PL should eat-all-rice/meal then come
‘All of you should finish eating before coming.’
‘All of you should eat before coming.’

b. Duhk-syū

但她 讀書 就 會 走。
Kēuhdeih duhk-saai-syū jauh wūih jāuh.
3rd PL read-all-book then will leave
‘After they graduate (complete their studies), they will leave.’

52). c. Hōi-dōu

的 醫生 開晒刀 先 可以 休息。
Dī yīsāng hōi-saai-dōu sīn hóyi yáusīk.
Cl doctor open-all-knife then be able to rest
‘The doctors will rest after completing the operation.’
‘The doctors will rest after all of them perform operations.’
d. Chêut-mâu

学生 出晒 猫，有人 真係 讀书。

Di hohsâng chêut-saai-mâu, mòuhyâhn jânhaih duhk-syû.

‘The students completely cheated. No one really studied.’

‘All the students cheated. No one really studied.’

e. Dâam-sâm

* 我啲 擔晒 心，都唔 知 點算。

* Ngôhdeih dâam-saai-sâm, dôu mh jî dîmsyun.

1st.PL worry-all also NEG know what to do

? ‘We are completely worried. (We) don’t even know what to do.’

?? ‘All of us are worried. (We) don’t even know what to do.’

* ‘We burdened all the hearts. (We) don’t even know what to do.’

f. Tâuh-jî

* 我啲 投資 晒，依家 冇 晒 錢。

* Ngôhdeih tâuh-jî-saai. Yihgâ móuh saai chin.

1st.PL invest-all Now NEG all money

‘We completely invested (in something). Now we don’t have any money.’

? ‘All of us invested. Now we don’t have any money.’

* ‘We invested all the resources. Now we don’t have any money.’

The results from the saai test look very unexpected. For example, all of these examples have the ‘completely’ or ‘finish doing something’ reading. This is also one of the meanings of saai when it modifies verbs. Clearly, none of the sentences show us that saai quantifies the O morphemes. In most of the cases, saai may quantify the preverbal NPs. But these readings are less acceptable and harder to retrieve. These findings contradict to the findings in (51). Why is this so?

There are two very important clues in the earlier discussions that can help explain the contradictions. First of all, we mentioned that the O element in a VO compound must
be generic/indefinite. We also mentioned in Chapter four that the *saai* particle must quantify definite NPs. When we combine these two facts together, we find that *saai* can only quantify the preverbal NPs of VO compounds. That is why most of these examples can be interpreted with *saai* quantifying the preverbal NPs. Moreover, *saai* also has the meaning of ‘completely’, which seems to appear in all of the interpretations in (52). It is unclear why the ‘completely’ reading is so much stronger than the quantifying reading. In any case, the *saai* test is not a valid test here because the O morphemes, regardless of whether they are a part of a VO compound or a free morpheme, can never be quantified by *saai* because they must be indefinite. Therefore, we conclude that the results from this test should be discarded.

Since the *saai* test is greatly affected by the definiteness of the O element, it may not be a good test from which to draw concrete conclusions in our study. Let’s look at the third test and see if we can make any conclusion from it.

The next test involves *maaih*, which modifies the O argument and the S argument. So it may be helpful to determine the status of the O element.

53). a. 連  我哋  都  食埋飯  至  吃。
   Lihn ngóhdeih dōu sīhk-màaih-faahn ji làih.
   even 1ST PL also eat-VPRTR-meal then come
   ‘Even we will come after eating (just like the others).’

b. 但  佢哋  都  讀埋書。
   Kéuihdeih dōu duhk-màaih-syū
   3RD PL also study-VPRTR
   ‘They also study (along with others).’
c. 阿李 都 開埋刀。
Lihn Ah-Lei dōu hōi-māaih-dōu.
even Lee also operate-VPRT
‘Even Lee gets operated on.’
‘Even Lee operate on (someone).’

d. 今日 阿李 都 出埋貓。
Gāmyaht lihn ngōh dōu chēut-māaih-māau.
today even 1SG also cheat-VPRT
‘Today even I cheated (along with others).’

e. 阿哥 都 擔心埋 一份。
Agō dōu dāam-sām-maai yāt fang.
elder brother also worry-VPRT one portion
‘Even (my) elder brother was worried (along with others).’

f. 呢 個 股票 幾 好。
Nī go gūpiu géi hōu.
‘This stock is pretty good.’

The findings from the māaih test are the same. In all of these sentences, the māaih particle modifies the preverbal NPs, not the O elements. This finding suggests that the O elements in these VO compounds are not real O arguments of the verbs and so the VO compounds are lexicalized items. However, as mentioned in Chapter four, footnote 4, definiteness seems to affect the interpretation of māaih. It is preferable not to have māaih modify something indefinite. For instance:

54). a. 不如 你 坐 埋 豬 啦?
Bātyūh léih choh māaih dang la.
why not 2SG sit VPRT chair PRT
‘Why don’t you sit on a chair (like many others)?’
b. 下次 纔 旅行，我 預 埋 你 噫啦。
Hah chi ge léuihahng, ngóh yu màaih léih ga la.
next time POSS travel 1ST SG expect VPRT 2ND SG PRT PRT
'For the upcoming travel commitment, I also count you in.'

c. ??下次 續 旅行，我 預 埋 人 噫啦。
??Hah chi ge léuihahng, ngóh yu màaih yàhn ga la.
next time POSS travel 1ST SG expect VPRT person PRT PRT
'For the upcoming travel commitment, I also count someone in.'

(54a) shows that màaih cannot modify the O argument because it is indefinite and non-referential. Màaih is interpreted to modify the A argument léih 'you'. For (54b and c), a similar situation is found. When the O argument of the verb yu 'to expect' is léih 'you' (definite and referential), màaih can modify it (54b). But when the O argument is replaced with an indefinite and non-referential noun yàhn 'person', the meaning of the sentence is odd and uncertain. These examples show that màaih is a modifier for definite and referential nouns. Hence, the results from the màaih test in (53) may be highly affected here, since the O elements in these cases are all generic/indefinite.

So far, the three tests that we have used give us different results. As we find in the case of relativization, sihk-faahn 'to eat rice/meal' was tested to be a VO verb phrase, but the màaih test suggested that this VO unit is a compound. Since these three tests do not give us enough information to draw any conclusion, more tests are needed.

Another test that we can use is topicalization. Topicalization involves moving a noun to the beginning of a sentence. In English (and many other languages), the O argument can be fronted.

55). This car, I like. (c.f. I like this car.)
This sentence may sound a bit strange. After all, topicalization of the O argument is not a very productive construction in English. In Cantonese, however, nouns may easily undergo topicalization.

56). a. 我 好 鍾意 呢 架 車。
Nhō hōu júngyi nī ga chē.
1SG very like this cl. car.
'I like this car very much.'

b. 呢 架 車, 我 好 鍾意。
Nī ga chē, nhō hōu júngyi.
this cl. car, 1SG very like
'This car, I like it very much.'

c.*架 車, 我 好 鍾意 呢。
*Ga chē, nhō hōu júngyi nī
car 1SG very like this
'This car, I like it very much.'

Nouns in Cantonese should be able to undergo topicalization (56b). However, it is not possible to strand part of a noun and topicalize it (56c). Similarly, it is not possible to extract a part of a true VO compound for topicalization. So if the O element in a VO unit can be stranded and topicalized, then it should be a sign that the unit may not be a single word, but rather a verb phrase.

57). Topicalization

a. 我唔使食飯嘅。
Nhō m̀ si sai sikh-faahn ga.
1SG NEG need eat-rice PRT
'I don't need to eat any meal.'
'I don't need to eat any rice.'
飯，我唔使食嘍。
Faahn, ngóh mh sái sihk ga.
"Meal, I don't need to eat."
"Rice, I don't need to eat."

b. 好努力嘅讀書。
Kéuih hóu lóulekgám duhk-syü.
"S/he studies very hard."

書，好努力嘅讀书。
Syü, kéuih hóu lóulekgám duhk.
"Study, s/he puts in much effort to do it."

c. 醫生就開咗刀啲。但係情況
Yisäng jauh hóï-jó-dóu lak. Daahnhaih chihngfong
doctor already open-PFT-knife PRT but situation

就唔知點。
jauh mh jí dim.
then NEG know what.
"The doctor already operated on (him/her), but the situation is still not certain."

d. 佢時時都出貓嘅啦。
Kéuih síhsíh dóu chéut-māau ga la.
"S/he always cheats."
From the examples in (57), we find that besides tāuh-jī ‘to invest’ and dāam-sām ‘to worry’, the other O elements in the VO units can be topicalized easily. The lexicalized meanings of the topicalized sentences are also retained. The results indicate that tāuh-jī and dāam-sām are true VO compounds. The rest are VO verb phrases.

Another test that we can use is what we would call ‘separation’. The assumption of this test is that if a polysyllable sequence is a single verb, nothing should be able to intervene between its elements. But if the sequence is just a verb phrase joined by syntax, then certain elements may be inserted into the sequence. These elements should include
aspect markers, verbal particles, adverbial phrases, etc. Here is an example of a
disyllabic verb.

58). 我 鐘意 / * 鐘意 隔離 屋 儌 女仔。
Ngój jüngyi-jó / * jüng-jó-yi gakléih úk go léuihjáí.
1st SG like-PFT / * like-PFT next house CL girl
'I have fallen in love with the girl next door.'

(58) shows that the disyllabic verb jüngyi cannot be separated by inserting the perfective
aspect marker jó. So if a VO compound is a true lexical item, then elements like aspect
markers should not be found between the V and the O elements. In contrast, if the V and
the O elements are joined by syntax, then aspects markers can be inserted, as shown in
the following examples.

59). a. 我 今日 食咗 三次 飯 啦。
Ngój gämyaht sihk-jó sääm chi faahn la.
1st SG today eat-PFT three times rice PRT
'I have already eaten meals three times today.'
'I have already eaten rice three times today.'

b. 佢 讀咗 四 個 鏡頭 書 啦。
Kéuih duhk-jó sei go jüngtau syü la.
3rd SG study-PFT four CL hour book PRT
'S/he has studied for four hours.'

c. 陳醫生 已經 開過 好 多 次 刀 嘎
Chanyiśang yígíng hōi-gwo hou dō chi dōu ga
Doctor Chan already open-EXP very many times knife PRT
la, mh sái gēn ge.
PRT NEG need afraid PRT
'Dr. Chan has much experience in performing operations, don't be afraid.'
In the examples above, not only were aspect markers inserted between the V elements and the O elements, adverbial phrases were also added. The results from the separation test show that all of these VO compounds can allow aspect markers and adverbial phrases to be inserted between the V and the O elements except dāam-sām ‘to worry’ and tàuh-jī ‘to invest’. These findings are the same as what we had for the topicalization test. The conclusion from the separation test is that sihk-faahn ‘to eat rice/a meal’, duhk- syū ‘to study’, hōi-dōu ‘to operate on’ and chēut-māau ‘to cheat’ are VO verb phrases. Dāam-sām ‘to worry’ and tàuh-jī ‘to invest’ are true VO compounds.

The last test we want to conduct is to see if the O elements can be used in any other context with the lexicalized meanings. In many cases, a VO compound often has a
different interpretation from its literal meaning. If the $O$ element can be used alone with the lexicalized meaning, then it means that the $O$ element, rather than the whole VO unit, is lexicalized. Hence, the VO compound is not a single word, but a verb phrase.

60). a. 明 餐 飯 炒 我 煮 椛。
   Nǐ chān faahn haìng ngōh jỳú ge.
   this CL rice COP 1st.SG cook PRT
   ‘As for this meal, I cooked it.’

   b. 我 整 這 呢 嗜 書 好 耐 啦。
   Ngōh jing-jó nǐ dí syū hóu lóí la.
   1st.SG make-PFT this CL book very long (time) PRT
   ‘I made these books very long time ago.’
   ‘I made these studies very long time ago.’

   c. 喪 把 種 刀 好 成功。
   Gó bá/jùng dòu hóu såhnggōng.
   that CL/cl knife very successful
   ‘That knife is very successful.’
   ‘That operation was very successful.’

   d. 明 種/次 貓 好 嚴重。
   Nǐ jek/* chi māau hóu yihnjuhng.
   This CL/* CL cat very serious
   ‘This cat is very serious.’
   ‘This cheating is very serious.’

   e. 阿媽 親 心，我 好 明白。
   Ah-mā ge sām, ngōh hóu mihnbkak.
   Mom POSS heart 1st.SG very understand
   ‘(My) mom’s heart, I understand it very much.’
   ‘(My) mom’s worry, I understand it very much.’

   f. 我 吃 會 界 呢 喂 資 尊
   * Ngōh mh wūi béi nǐ dí ji̍ h léih.
   1st.SG NEG will give this CL resources 2nd.SG
   ‘I will not give you any resources.’
   ‘I will not give you any investment.’
Interestingly, without the V elements, most of the O elements cannot retain their lexicalized meaning. The only one that can retain its meaning without its V element is faahn ‘rice/meal’. It means that the relationship between the V element and the O element of the other units are closer than pure verb phrases.

**5.4.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The following table summarizes all the results from the tests above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relativization</th>
<th>Saai</th>
<th>Maaih</th>
<th>Topical-</th>
<th>Separation</th>
<th>Stand Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sihk-faahn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to eat rice/a meal’</td>
<td>Preverbal NP</td>
<td>Preverbal NP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duhk-syu</td>
<td>Yes (loses lexicalized meaning)</td>
<td>O Element</td>
<td>Preverbal NP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to study’</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hoi-dou</td>
<td>Yes (loses lexicalized meaning)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Preverbal NP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to operate on’</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheut-miau</td>
<td>Yes (loses lexicalized meaning)</td>
<td>Preverbal NP</td>
<td>Preverbal NP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to cheat’</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daam-sam</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to worry’</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tauih-ji</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to invest’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>Preverbal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the findings we obtained from these tests, there are several contradictions. But we believe that the tests here can show us something about VO compounds. First, the saai particle test and the maaih test should be discarded because the results were affected by definiteness. That means these two tests cannot tell us much about the syntactic facts
of VO compounds because no matter which VO compounds we test, the results from these two tests would always be the same. Second, after discarding the saai and màaïh tests, a pattern emerges. Of the six VO compounds we tested, two of them consistently behaved as single units, namely: dāam-sām ‘to worry’ and tāuh-jī ‘to invest’. For these two VO compounds, relativization was not allowed, the O elements could not be topicalized or used in other contexts, and nothing can be inserted between the V and the O elements. These results show that they must be real VO compounds, and hence they are single verbs. On the other end of the spectrum, the syntactic behavior of sihk-faahn ‘to eat rice/ a meal’ is just the opposite of dāam-sām ‘to worry’ and tāuh-jī ‘to invest’. Relativization can easily be applied to it without changing its lexicalized meaning, faahn ‘rice/ a meal’ could be topicalized or used in other contexts, and certain elements like aspect markers could be inserted between the V element and the O element. The results overwhelming suggest that sihk-faahn is just a verb phrase. It is not a real VO compound.

What is left is the other three VO units: duhk-syu ‘to study’, hōi-dōu ‘to operate on’ and chēut-māau ‘to cheat’. In terms of topicalization and separation, they behave like verb phrases because (1) the O elements can be moved to the beginning of a sentence and the lexicalized meanings remain, and (2) aspect markers and adverbial phrases can be inserted between the units. However, they also behave like single units with respect to relativization and the ability to be used in other contexts. How can we account for these facts? There are two possible analyses to answer this question. One of the analyses is to believe that these VO units are still in the process of grammaticalizing from verb phrases to true VO compounds. If we can borrow the idea of having a continuum between verb
phrases on one end and VO compounds on the other end, then these three VO units are somewhere in between the continuum. One of the reasons why they are still not totally grammaticalized is probably because there are many similar looking VO verb phrases in the language that allow syntactic processes like topicalization and relativization to be applied to the O arguments. By analogy, therefore, these highly lexicalized units are also affected.

Let’s take hōi-dōu ‘to operate on’ (lit. open-knife) as an example. In Cantonese, there are many phrases that begin with the verb hōi ‘to open’: hōi cheung ‘open the window’, hōi muhn ‘open the door’, hōi dinsi ‘open the television’ (i.e., to turn on the television), etc. These combinations are clearly verb phrases based on syntactic and semantic criteria, and they are eligible to undergo various syntactic processes. One of them is the jeung construction. From our tests above, it was shown that the jeung marked NP is the O argument of the main verb. All these instances of hōi can appear in the jeung construction.

61). a. Hōi muhn

我 將 門 開咗。
Ngoh jeung muhn hōi-jó.
1SG jeung door open-PFT
‘I open the door.’

b. Hōi cheung

小明 將 個 窗 開咗。
Siuhmihung jeung go cheung hōi-jó
Siuming jeung CL window open-PFT
‘Siuming opened the window.’
Since there are syntactic phrases built around hōi, eventually speakers apply the same syntactic processes to hōi-dōu, thereby slowing down the process of grammaticalization.

The other analysis is to assume that there are two homophonous versions for duhk-syu ‘to study’, hōi-dōu ‘to operate on’ and chēut-māau ‘to cheat’. One of which is a real VO compound, and the other one is a VO VP. When topicalization and the separation test were applied, it was the VPs that were tested. Therefore, the O elements in these units were able to be topicalized, or to be separated from the verb. In contrast, when relativization and the ‘stand alone’ test were applied, it was the VO compounds there were tested. Therefore, the O elements cannot be relativized, or cannot retain their lexicalized meanings in other contexts.

These two analyses require different assumptions about syntax, and we will refrain from taking a position on it.

5.5 COVERBS

The coverb construction is often controversial among linguists who work on Chinese. Its structure is exactly the same as the common serial verb construction (SVC).

62). a. Schematic structure of the common SVC

\[
\text{NP}_1 - V_1 - (\text{NP}_2) - V_2 - (\text{NP}_3)
\]

b. Schematic structure of the coverb construction

\[
\text{NP}_1 - V_1 - \text{NP}_2 - V_2 - (\text{NP}_3)
\]

[The position of V1 is where coverbs are found]

Semantically, \( V_1 \) may be interpreted as a verb or a preposition. The following sentence is an example of this construction in Mandarin (data from Li and Thompson 1973).
The word *yong* ($V_1$) can be interpreted as a verb, meaning ‘to use’, or it can be interpreted as a preposition, meaning ‘with’. If it is a verb, then the structure is a very typical SVC structure. But if it is a preposition, it is no more than a simple sentence with a prepositional phrase preceding the main verb. Chen (1993) points out that coverbs have the function of verbs when used alone. Yet, when they are used in a serial verb construction, it is not clear whether they function as verbs or prepositions. This controversy is not only found in Mandarin. In Cantonese, according to Matthews and Yip (1996), there are at least eleven coverbs that function like prepositional phrases in English, but also resemble the serial verb construction which is a basic feature of Chinese syntax (p. 60). The main question is then: are coverbs real verbs or prepositions?

Some work has been done to answer this question. For example, it is found that coverbs (at least the ones in Cantonese) may take aspect markers (data from Matthews and Yip 1996:61) (modified):

64). a. 我 同緊 / *住 但 講 咁。

Nhô tûng-gân / *-jyuh kéiih góng yeh.
1SG with-PROG / *-CONT 3SG talk things
‘I’m talking to him/her.’

b. 你 喜過 / *吃 / *緊 我 屋企 蹦 咁？

Lêi-hái-gwo / *-jó / *-gân nghô ūkkéi fan méih?
2SG at-EXP / *-PFT / *-PROG 1SG house sleep not-yet
‘Have you ever slept in my house?’
Although it is true that these coverbs can take aspect markers, they are quite restricted in their usage. Some coverbs may not take certain aspect markers.

In addition to taking certain aspect markers, coverbs may participate in the V-not-V question formation, like any regular verbs.

65). a. Regular verb

```
你 去唔去 食飯 呀?
Léih heui-mh-heui silhk-faahn a?
2^ND SG go-not-go eat-rice PRT
'Are you going to eat?'
```

**Coverbs**

b. 我 同唔同 佢 講嘅 好 呀?

```
Ngóh tūhng-mh-tūhng kēuih góng yeh hóu a?
1^ST SG with-not-with 3^RD SG talk things good PRT
'Should I talk to him/her?'
```

c. 你 嘢喢喢 我 屋企 睡 呀?

```
Léih hái-mh-hái ngóh ükkéi fan a?
2^ND SG at-not-at 1^ST SG house sleep PRT
'Are you sleeping in my house?'
```

These facts here seem to support the idea that coverbs in Cantonese are just like regular verbs. In the light of what we know so far, it is interesting to test the NPs that follow immediately after coverbs and find out if they behave like O arguments or oblique NPs. So in the remaining part of this chapter some Cantonese coverbs will be tested with the three tests that we have been using. The findings may or may not support what we have discovered thus far.
5.5.1 Testing the NPs

In this section, we will examine four sentences containing different coverbs with the help of the three tests we have been using: the relativization test, the particle *saai* test and the *màaih* test. We will also examine a regular SVC sentence for comparison. Here are the sentences:

66). *A regular SVC*

我 買 的 糖水 燀 食。
Ngôh màaih dĩ tongséui làih sihk.
1st SG buy CL dessert come eat
‘I bought some dessert to eat.’

67). *Coverb sentences*

a. 我 跟 朋友 去 旅行。
Ngôhdeih tūhng dĩ pahngyáuh heui jéuihahng.
1st PL with CL friend go travel
‘We went traveling with (our) friends.’

b. 佢 煮 我 屋企 煮 飯 食。
Kéihdeih hái ngôh ükkéi jyú faahn sihk.
3rd PL LOC 1st SG house cook rice eat
‘They cooked food to eat in my house.’

c. 今日 你係 揮 的 老人家 擁 行李。
Gámyah leihdeih bōng dĩ lóuhyāhngā lóh hahngléi.
today 2nd PL for CL old people carry luggage
‘Today you carried luggage for the old people.’

d. 我 跟 日本人 學 日文。
Ngôhdeih gān dĩ yahtbúnyahn holk yahtmán.
1st PL with CL Japanese learn Japanese
‘We are learning Japanese from some Japanese people.’
The first test is relativization. Relativizing the NPs after the coverbs with the gap strategy means that the NPs are O arguments. If the pronoun (retention) strategy is used, then the NPs should be considered to be oblique NPs.

68) \( RC_\text{of}(66) \)

\[
\text{我 買 ___/∗但 喜食 吃 有 的} \\
[\text{REL Ngôh mâaih ___/∗ kéuǐh lái̋h sihk}] \text{ gò dī} \\
1^{\text{ST}} \text{ SG buy ___/∗ 3^{RD}} \text{ SG come eat that CL}
\]

dessert 好 好味。

tongséui hóu hóuméi.

dessert very tasty

‘The dessert that I bought to eat is very tasty.’

69). a. \( RC_\text{of}(67a) \)

\[
\text{我地 同 *___/但地 去 旅行 吃喝 的} \\
[\text{REL Ngôhdeih tūhng *___/kéuǐhdeih heui léuihahng}] \text{ gò dī} \\
1^{\text{ST}} \text{ PL with *___/3^{RD}} \text{ PL go travel that CL}
\]

朋友 想 喝 星期三 見 我地 喝。

pahngyáuh scèng hái sīngkéihsāam gin ngôhdeih wo.

friend want LOC Wednesday see 1^{ST} PL PRT

‘The friends with whom we went traveling want to see us on Wednesday.’

b. \( RC_\text{of}(67b) \)

\[
\text{但地 喝 ___/喝 度 煮 飯 食喝 的} \\
[\text{REL Kéuǐhdeih hái ___/gò douh jyú faahn sihk}] \text{ gò} \\
3^{RD} \text{ PL at *___/LOC there cook rice eat that}
\]

問 屋 係 我 吃。

gāan ūk hai̋h ngôh ge.

CL house COP 1^{ST} SG POSS

‘The house where they cooked food to eat is mine.’
c. RC of (67c)

![Chinese text]

'今日 你哋 幫 * 亙哋 運 行李
[REL Gamyaht léihdeih bōng * kéuihdeih lōh hahngléi]
Today 2ND PL for * 3RD PL carry luggage

啲啲 老人家 好 感激 你哋。
gó dì lóuhýângsā hóu gámgǐk léihdeih.
that CL old people very appreciate 2ND PL
'The old people for whom you carried luggage appreciated you a lot.'

d. RC of (67d)

![Chinese text]

'我哋 跟 * 亙哋 學 日文 啲啲
[REL Ngóhdeih gân * kéuihdeih hōb̂k yahtmán] gó dì
1ST PL with * 3RD PL learn Japanese that CL

日本人 好 好人。
yañtbúnyāhn hóu hóuyāhn.
Japanese very nice people
'The Japanese people from whom we are learning Japanese are very nice.'

(68) shows that the gap strategy is used when the NP of the first verb in an SVC is relativized. In (69), the relativization test yields findings that are just the opposite of what we might expect. As stated above, these coverbs are capable of taking certain aspect markers and they can be turned into questions by the V-not-V strategy. These facts suggest that the coverbs behave like regular verbs. However, from relativization, we discover that all of the NPs immediately follow the coverbs are not O arguments. They behave as if they are oblique because the pronoun strategy must be used to form the right relative clauses. From the outcome of the relativization test, it seems that coverbs (at least the ones that we tested) are either oblique markers (prepositions) or intransitive verbs that take oblique arguments.
The second test involves saai. We can draw a conclusion from the way saai quantifies the NPs in these sentences.

70)  **Putting saai with an SVC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>我買糖水喝。</td>
<td>I bought all the dessert to eat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nghóh máaih saai dī tongséui lāih sihk.</td>
<td>'I bought all the dessert to eat.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st SG buy all CL dessert come eat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

71) **Putting saai with coverb sentences**

a. 我他同朋友去旅行。                              | All of us went traveling with (our) friends.                           |
| Nghóhdeih tūhng saai dī pahngyáuh heui léuihahng. | 'All of us went traveling with (our) friends.'                         |
| 1st PL with all CL friend go travel             |                                                                         |

b. 但他與我們朋友去旅行。                          | All of them cooked food to eat in my house.                            |
| Kéuihdeih hái saai ngóh ükkéi jyú faahn sihk.    | 'All of them cooked food to eat in my house.'                          |
| 3rd PL at all 1st SG house cook rice eat         |                                                                         |

c. 今日你他幫朋友扛老人家運行李。                 | Today all of you carried luggage for the old people.                    |
| Gámyah télhdeih bōng saai dī lóuhyahngāa lóh    | 'Today all of you carried luggage for the old people.'                  |
| today 2nd PL for all CL old people carry         |                                                                         |
| hahngléi.                                       | luggage                                                                 |
| luggage                                         |                                                                         |

d. 我跟他日本人學日文。                            | All of us are learning Japanese from some Japanese people.             |
| Nghóhdeih gān saai dī yahtbúnyáhn hohk yahtmán.  | 'All of us are learning Japanese from some Japanese people.'           |
| 1st PL with all CL Japanese learn Japanese      |                                                                         |

The results from the saai test echo what we found from the relativization test. Saai in the SVC quantifies the NP following the first verb. In the coverb sentences it quantifies not
the NPs that follow the coverbs, but the first NPs in these sentences. This shows us that the NPs immediately following the coverbs are none other than oblique NPs.

The last test we will use is the maaih test. Maaih modifies either an S argument or an O argument.

72). 我 買 糖水 喝

Ngóh máaih máaih dí tongséui láih sihk.
1ST SG buy VPRT CL dessert come eat
'I bought some dessert to eat (in addition to other food).'

73). a. 我們 同 埋 兒 子

Lihnt, ngóhdéih dòu tühng máaih dí pahngyáuh heuí
Even 1ST PL also with VPRT CL friend go

旅行。
léuihahng.
travel
‘Even we went traveling with (our) friends.’

b. 我們 同 埋 我 廚 我 稻 稻 飯 飯

Kéihhdéih hái máaih ngóh ükkéi jyú saahn sihk.
3RD PL at VPRT 1ST SG house cook rice eat
‘Even they cooked food to eat in my house.’

c. 今日 你們 幫 埋 進 老人家 箱

Gámyaht léihdëih bön máaih dí lóuhyáangá láh
today 2ND PL for VPRT CL old people carry

行李。
hahngléi.
luggage
‘Today even you carried luggage for the old people, (in addition to the other who carry).’

d. 我們 跟 埋 同 日本人 學 日文。

Ngóhdéih gán máaih dí yahbúnñáh hóhk yahtmán.
1ST PL with VPRT CL Japanese learn Japanese
‘We are learning Japanese along with some Japanese people.’
Once again the findings from the màaih test concur with the results from relativization and the saai test. Màaih in the SVC modifies the NP dì tongseùi ‘the dessert’, which is the O argument of the first verb. Similarly, màaih modifies the first NPs of the sentences in all four coverb sentences. Màaih cannot modify the NPs after the coverbs. The findings suggest that the NPs are oblique.

5.5.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The three tests that were applied in the previous section all supported the conclusion that coverbs are better described as prepositions rather than verbs. This conclusion seems to be puzzling, because it contradicts the syntactic facts that coverbs can take certain aspect markers or form questions. One may argue that coverb phrases should be interpreted as subordinate clauses in a serial verb construction. Since they are subordinate, the NPs that follow the coverbs are not the real O arguments of the sentences, and that is why the tests we used didn’t turn out as expected. We believe that this position is wrong simply because subordinate clauses are not known to form V-not-V questions.

74). a. 我 借 錢 買 东西。

*Nghô lâih je chin màaih yeh.
1SG come borrow money buy things
‘I come to borrow money to buy things.’

b* 我 借 錢 買 呀? 買 買 东西。

*Nghô lâih je chin màaih-mh-màaih yeh a?
1SG come borrow money buy-not-buy things
‘Do I come to borrow money to buy things?’
The position we take is that coverbs are undergoing a process of grammaticalization. That is, they are turning from full verbs into prepositions. In the process, coverbs may begin losing their ability to treat the NPs that follow them as their O arguments, and eventually they may lose the ability to take tense/aspect markers. This seems to be what is happening in Mandarin. Some coverbs in Mandarin are still able to take aspect markers, while some have lost this ability. Compare the following sentences:

75). a. *小李在了中國很有名。
   * Xiao-Li zai-le zhongguo hen youming.
   Li in-PFT China very famous
   ‘Li was very famous when he was in China.’

   b. *Data from Li and Thompson 1974:267 (my gloss and translation)*

   他用了筷子吃飯。
   Ta yong-le kuaizi chi fan.
   3SG use-PFT chopsticks eat rice
   ‘S/he ate with chopsticks.’

These examples show that zai ‘be at; in’ can no longer take aspect markers. But yong ‘use; with’ can still appear with an aspect marker. Grammaticalization in Mandarin has started to cause some coverbs to lose their verbhood. Grammaticalization of coverbs in Cantonese may not be as fast as in Mandarin. Nonetheless, Cantonese coverbs have already begun to treat their NPs as oblique NPs. The process of grammaticization in Cantonese and Mandarin coincides with the typology of grammaticalization that Lord (1993) suggests:

In general, the direction of shift is from major lexical category to minor lexical category, from content-word to lexical form-word, and from an
open class to a closed class... The trend is from a clause with a serial verb string to a clause with a single main verb accompanied by 'modifying verbs,' some of which are losing verb status. Over time, a simple two-verb serial construction can undergo restructuring to, for example, verb plus prepositional phrase, or verb plus object complement and eventually subordinate clause, or verb plus adverb or auxiliary (Lord 1993 235-236).
Chapter 6

Ergative Verb Construction

6.1 BACKGROUND

The last construction we want to examine in this dissertation is the Ergative Verb construction\(^1\). This term was coined by Y-H.A. Li (1990) to describe a construction where the undergoer of the action can appear either before the verb or after the verb. The verb itself denotes a change of state or location. For example (Matthews and Yip 1996:40)

1. a. The undergoer appears before the verb

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{他} & \quad \text{老豆} \quad \text{死咗。} \\
Kéuih & \quad lóuhdauh \quad sēi-jó. \\
3^{RD} \text{ SG} & \quad \text{father} \quad \text{die-PFT} \\
\text{S/he lost his/her father.}
\end{align*}
\]

b. The undergoer appears after the verb

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{他} & \quad \text{死咗} \quad \text{老豆。} \\
Kéuih & \quad sēi-jó \quad lóuhdauh \\
3^{RD} \text{ SG} & \quad \text{die-PFT} \quad \text{father} \\
\text{S/he lost his/her father.}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^1\) In this dissertation, ‘ergative’ is the equivalent of ‘unaccusative’, which is different from the use of ‘ergative’ as in ‘ergative languages’ or ‘ergative case marking’.
c. The undergoer appears before the verb

我地 我船 沉吃。
Ngôhdêih dî syuhn chahm-jô.
1st PL CL boat sink-PFT
‘Our boats sank.’

d. The undergoer appears after the verb

我地 沉吃 我船。
Ngôhdêih chahm-jô dî syuhn.
1st PL sink-PFT CL boat
‘Our boats sank.’
‘We sank the boats.’

There are two kinds of word order in these sentences. First, when the possessive NPs kêuih lôuhdauh ‘his/her father’ and ngôhdêih dî syuhn ‘our boats’ are found in preverbal position in (1a) and (1c) respectively, they resemble the SV word order. In contrast, when the possessor NPs kêuih ‘his/her’ and ngôhdêih ‘our’ are in preverbal position, and the possessed NP lôuhdauh ‘father’ and dî syuhn ‘boats’ are in postverbal position ((1b) and (1d) respectively), these sentences resemble the SVO word order. The SV word order seems to be quite normal, but the SVO word order is at first glance strange because the meaning of séî ‘to die’ and chahm ‘to sink’ do not imply the presence of more than one argument. Yet, even if we neglect the semantics of these verbs and just look at the structure from the surface, as in (1b) and (1d), the possessed NPs lôuhdauh ‘father’ and dî syuhn ‘boats’ do appear after the main verbs. The two kinds of sentences are obviously related, but they exhibit such a wide range of possible patterns: SV for (1a) and
(1c), and SVX^2 for (1b) and (1d). How do we account for these syntactic facts? More importantly, are these sentences transitive or intransitive? Once again, our task here is to put the sentences to the tests we have been using, and the results may give us some insight into this construction.

6.2 TESTING THE CONSTRUCTION

In this section, we will once again use relativization, the particle saai test and the màaih test to examine this construction.

6.2.1 TEST 1: RELATIVIZATION

The first test we will use is relativization. As discussed in a number of occasions in the previous chapters, the strategy employed to form relative clauses in Cantonese depends on the type of NPs undergoing the process. If a core argument is relativized, the gap strategy is used. If a peripheral argument (non-core) is relativized, then the pronoun strategy is called for. The relativization test should reveal to us whether the postverbal NP in (1b) and (1d) are O arguments or oblique NPs. So here are the results.

2). Relativization of (1)

a. RC of (1a)

____/ * 佢 死咗個人係佢老豆。  
[REL ____/ * Kéuih sêi-jô] gó go yânh haih [kéuih lóuhdauh].
____/ * 3^rd SG die-PFT that CL person COP 3^rd SG father

'The person who died was his/her father.'

---

^2 Since the status of the postverbal NP is not known at this point, we will not label it O. Instead, X will be used.
b. RC of (1b)

[ref Kēuih sēi-jō / * kēuīh] gó go yāhn haih
3rd sg die-pft / * 3rd sg that cl person cop

The person of his/her who died was his/her father.

c. RC of (1c)

[ref _/ * Kēuīh chahm-jō] gó dī syuhn juhng meih
3rd sg sink-pft that cl boat still not yet

The boats that sank are still not found yet.

d. RC of (1d)

[ref Ngōhdeih chahm-jō / * kēuīh] gó dī syuhn
1st pl sink-pft / * 3rd sg that cl boat

The boats of ours that sank are still not yet found.

Interestingly, the relativization test reveals that the possessed NPs lōuhdauh ‘father’ and dī syuhn ‘boats’ in the SVX pattern are relativized by means of the gap strategy, not the pronoun strategy when they follow the main verbs (2b and 2d). The findings show that when the possessed NPs follow these ergative verbs, they are not oblique NPs. As for the
SV pattern, when the two possessive NPs precede the main verbs, the whole NPs (i.e. along with the pronouns keiuh ‘his/her’ and ngóhdeih ‘our’) undergo relativization, which means that the possessive NPs behave like S arguments in their respective sentences.

6.2.2 TEST 2: THE saai PARTICLE TEST

Another test to apply involves the particle saai, which quantifies the S and the O arguments. If the postverbal possessed NPs as in (1b) and (1d) can be quantified by saai, the results will suggest that they are the O arguments of their sentences. This will provide further support, in addition to the relativization test, for the claim that séi ‘die’ and chahm ‘sink’ can be used transitively.

3) a. 佢 父母死晒。
   Kéuih fuhmóuh séi saai.
   3<sup>rd</sup> SG parents die all
   ‘Both of his/her parents died.’

b. 佢死晒父母，依家只係剩番一個
   Kéuih séi saai fuhmóuh, yihgā jihaih dákśaan yāt go
   3<sup>rd</sup> SG die all parents now only survived by one CL
   ‘S/he lost both parents, and now is survived by an elder brother.’

c. 我哋嘅船沉晒。
   Ngóhdeih dī syuhn chahm saai.
   1<sup>st</sup> PL CL boat sink all
   ‘All of our boats sank.’
As discussed in the previous test, (3a) and (3c), though they look very similar to their counterparts (3b) and (3d), are intransitive sentences. *Kéuih fuhmóuh* ‘his/her parents’ and *ngóhdeih dī syuhn* ‘our boats’ function as single noun phrases in the relativization test, and here the *saai* test also supports that conclusion. If you recall, *saai* quantifies either the *S* or *O* argument. (3a) and (3c) show that *saai* quantifies the whole possessive NPs *kéuih fuhmóuh* ‘his/her parents’ and *ngóhdeih dī syuhn* ‘our boats’, rather than parts of them. This means that the NPs are truly S arguments. (3b) and (3d), on the other hand, show that the bare postverbal NPs *fuhmóuh* ‘parents’ (3b) and *dī syuhn* ‘boats’ (3d) are O arguments in the SVX pattern. *saai* in both sentences quantifies only the nouns following the verbs. This conclusion matches the conclusion of the relativization test.

### 6.2.3 Test 3: The *Màaih* Test

The last test involves *màaih*, which is shown to modify either the *S* argument or the *O* argument, just like the way *saai* works. *Màaih* has the meaning of ‘along with’ or ‘in addition’ when it modifies NPs. The verbs used in the previous sections are *séi* ‘to die’ and *chahm* ‘to sink’.

4). a. 佢 父母 （都）死 埋。

*Kéuih fuhmóuh (dōu) séi màaih.*

‘Both of his/her parents also died.’
Both (4a) and (4b) share the same meaning -- the parents are dead in addition to the other relatives. Clearly, the test shows that màaih has to modify the preverbal possessive NP in (4a) and the postverbal possessed NP in (4b). It coincides with our previous tests, which suggest that the postverbal NP after séi ‘to die’ in the SVX pattern is an O argument, and the whole possessive NP in (4a) is an S argument. The same can be said about (4c) and (4d). The meanings are the same in these sentences -- besides having many things sunk, the boats also sank. The same conclusion can be drawn from these two sentences. The postverbal possessed NP in (4d) in the SVX pattern is an O argument, and the preverbal NP in (4c) is an S argument.
6.2.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the previous sections three tests were used to test whether the postverbal NP in the Ergative Verb construction is an O argument or an oblique NP. Here is a list of summary extracted from the results of the tests.

Table 6.1: Summary of the tests for the ergative verb construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Relativization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>lóuhdauh séi</em> 'to lost father' (2a)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>séi lóuhdauh</em> 'to lost father' (2b)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>syuhn chahn</em> 'to sink boats' (2c)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>chahn syuhn</em> 'to sink boats' (2d)</td>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2. The particle <em>saai</em> test</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>fuhmóuh séi</em> 'to lost parent' (3a)</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Core (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>séi fuhmóuh</em> 'to lost parent' (3b)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>syuhn chahn</em> 'to sink boats' (3c)</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Core (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>chahn syuhn</em> 'to sink boats' (3d)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. The <em>màaih</em> test</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>fuhmóuh séi</em> 'to lost parent' (4a)</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Core (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>séi fuhmóuh</em> 'to lost parent' (4b)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>syuhn chahn</em> 'to sink boats' (4c)</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Core (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>chahn syuhn</em> 'to sink boats' (4d)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Core (O)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of these tests overwhelmingly point to the conclusion that the postverbal NP in the SVX pattern is none other than an O argument. This means when the undergoer of the action is in the postverbal position, the sentence is transitive. But when the possessive NP appears in the preverbal position, the sentence is intransitive.

6.3 SOME POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

Though we have made a conclusion in the previous section that seems to be well-supported, there are nonetheless some arguments against our conclusion. One of the most powerful arguments is the fact that if a NP is an O argument, it should be able to
undergo topicalization. However, what we find is that the O argument in the SVX pattern cannot be topicalized. Here are some examples (all the (a) sentences are before topicalization. All the (b) sentences are after topicalization.)

5). **Topicalizing the O argument of a regular transitive verb**

a. 我 打 住 Mary 一下。
   Ngôh dâ-jô Mary yâthâh.
   1st SG hit-PFT Mary once
   ‘I hit Mary once.’

b. Mary, 我 打 住 一下。
   Mary, ngôh dâ-jô yâthâh.
   Mary 1st SG hit-PFT once
   ‘As for Mary, I hit her once.’

6). **Topicalizing the O argument of a Verb of Motion (MV)**

a. 佢 食過 餐 間 酒樓 好多 次。
   Keùih sihk-gwo gó gâan jâulâuh hóudô chi.
   3rd SG eat-EXP that CL restaurant numerous times
   ‘S/he has eaten at that restaurant many times.’

b. 餐 間 酒樓, 佢 食過 好多 次。
   Gó gâan jâulâuh, keùih sihk-gwo hóudô chi.
   that CL restaurant 3rd SG eat-EXP numerous times
   ‘As for that restaurant, s/he has eaten there many times.’

7). **Topicalizing the O argument of a Locative Verb (LV)**

a. 你 坐 喝 張 椅 成 日。
   Lêih choh-jô gó jéung dang sêhng yah!
   2nd SG sit-PFT that CL chair whole day
   ‘You sat on that chair for the whole day.’

b. 喝 張 椅, 你 坐 喝 成 日。
   Gó jéung dang, lêih choh-jô sêhng yah!
   that CL chair 2nd SG sit-PFT whole day
   ‘As for that chair, you sat there for the whole day.’
8. **Topicalizing the O argument of a Verb with an adverbial object (AOV)**

a. 佢 解釋咗 三次 界我 聽。
    Kéuih gáaihsík-jó sáam chi béí ngóh têng.
    3<sup>rd</sup> SG explain-PFT three times to 1<sup>st</sup> SG listen
    ‘S/he has already explained (it) three times to me.’

b. 三次 啲，佢 解釋咗 畀我 聽。
    Sáam chi la, kéuih gáaihsík-jó béí ngóh têng.
    three times PRT 3<sup>rd</sup> SG explain-PFT to 1<sup>st</sup> SG listen
    ‘Three time already, s/he has already explained (it) to me.’

9. **Topicalizing the postverbal argument of an Ergative Verb (EV)**

a. 佢 死咗 老荷。
    Kéuih séi-jó lóuhdauh
    3<sup>rd</sup> SG die-PFT father
    ‘S/he lost his/her father.’

b. 老荷，佢 死咗。
    Lóuhdauh, kéuih séi-jó.
    father 3<sup>rd</sup> SG die-PFT
    ‘Father, he died.’

c. 我哋 沉咗 咁 船。
    Ngóhdeih chahm-jó dí syuhn.
    1<sup>st</sup> PL sink-PFT CL boat
    ‘Our boats sank.’
    ‘We sank the boats.’

d. 咁 船，我哋 沉咗。
    Dí syuhn, ngóhdeih chahm-jó.
    CL boat 1<sup>st</sup> PL sink-PFT
    ‘The boats of ours, they sank.’
    ‘The boats, we sank them.’

One of the characteristics of O arguments (although not just O arguments) is that they should have the capability to undergo topicalization. That is why the examples in (5) - (8) can be topicalized (as we have argued in Chapter four, the postverbal NP of some MV,
LV and AOV are O arguments). However, when it comes to the ergative verbs, we find that it is not possible to topicalize the postverbal NPs (as seen in (9b) and (9d)). Drsyuhn ‘the boats’ in (9d) may seem to be able to topicalize, but the interpretation has to be the transitive usage of chahm ‘to sink’ (or ‘to cause something to sink’). This fact is puzzling. This is a direct contradiction to what we expect to find. Yet, we find that topicalization is only part of the story. There is another fact that seems to argue against the transitive analysis of the Ergative Verb construction.

The second problem is that the EV construction seems to be very restricted in usage. Although it is a well-known fact that verbs subcategorize the type(s) of complements they may appear with, they should be able to take any complements within the subcategories. For example, in English, the verb go must be followed by a location or an adverb. So anyone can say:

10). a. I go to Europe.

   b. My mind went to outer space.

As long as the complements of go stay within the range of a location, the sentences should remain grammatical. Yet for the Ergative verbs that we have been examining, they can only take certain nouns. Compare:

11). a. 佢 死咗 爸爸/媽媽/細佬/狗仔。
   Kéuìh séi-jó bahbá/mahmá/sáílóu/gáujái.
   3RD SG die-PFT father/mother/younger brother/puppy
   ‘S/he lost his/her father/mother/younger brother/puppy.’
   (i.e. ‘His/Her father/mother/younger brother/puppy died.’)
The postverbal position of the SVX pattern must be an undergoer, and for the verb séi ‘to die’, it subcategories animate NPs. Yet not all animate NPs can be used in this construction. It is shown that the postverbal NP must contain a kinship term or an inalienable NP. This fact is even more puzzling than the first problem because such a restriction on kinship terms / inalienable NPs is hardly found for the subcategorization of regular transitive verbs. This construction seems to be more complicated than we first anticipated.

In order to solve this mystery, we must first revisit the notion of Ergative Verbs.

6.4 ERGATIVE VERBS VISITED

Ergative verbs, also known as unaccusative verbs, are intransitive verbs that take undergoer NPs as their complements. Unlike their counterparts, unergative verbs (some call them accusative verbs), which take agent-like NPs, the single core arguments of ergative verbs must be affected by the actions signified by the verbs. Cross-linguistically, examples of these verbs include: burn, fall, freeze, dry, grow, etc.

The syntax of ergative verbs has been widely studied by many linguists, and many syntactic theories have different ways to account for the syntactic facts. However, among these theories, there is always one thing in common: the single core argument of an ergative verb is the O argument (as supposed to the S argument) of the verb. In Government and Binding theory, for instance, the core argument is found in the
complement position of a VP in the deep structure. In Relational Grammar, the core argument is the 2 relation (direct object) in the initial stratum (see Perlmutter 1978 for more discussion). Cantonese contains some patterns that support this claim. Let’s see the following sentences:

12). *Ergative Verb*

a. 落 雨 啦！
   Lohk yûh la!
   fall rain PRT
   ‘It’s raining.’

b. 前面 出現咗 一 個 人。
   Chinmihn chêuyin-jô yât go yâhn.
   front appear-PFT one CL person
   ‘A person appeared in the front.’

*Unergative Verb*

c. 佢 咲緊。
   Kêuih haam-gân.
   3RD SG cry-PROG
   ‘S/he is crying.’

d.*咲緊 佢。
   *Haam-gân këuih
   cry-PROG 3RD SG
   ‘S/he is crying.’

e. 我 跳舞。
   Ngóh tiumóuh.
   1ST SG dance
   ‘I dance / I am dancing.’

f.*跳舞 我。
   *Tiumóuh ngóh
   dance 1ST SG
   ‘I dance.’
Verbs like *lohk* 'to fall' and *chēutyin* 'to appear' are typical examples of ergative verbs, and the core arguments of these verbs can appear in the postverbal position. However, *haam* 'cry' and *tiūmòuh* 'dance', which are unergative verbs, cannot allow their single arguments to appear postverbally, as in (12d) and (12f). More interestingly, the arguments of ergative verbs in Cantonese may also appear in the preverbal position. Compare these with (12a) and (12b).

13). a. 雨 落得 好 大。
   Yūh lohk-dāk hōù dāaih.
   ‘The rain is falling heavily.’

   b. 前面 有 一 個人 出現咗。
   Chinmihn yāuh yāt go yāhn chēutyin-jō³.
   ‘A person appeared in the front.’

As is shown here, one of the properties of ergative verbs in Cantonese is that they allow their arguments to appear either preverbally (NP V) or postverbally (V NP). If this fact is right, we should also expect the preverbal core arguments of *sei* ‘to die’ in (1a) and *chahm* ‘to sink’ in (1c) to appear postverbally.

14). a. 死咗 但 老豆。
   Sēi-jō kéuih lóuhdauh.
   ‘S/he lost his/her father.’

---

³ *yau* ‘to have’ must be added if the A or S argument is indefinite.
The sentences in (14) are perfectly acceptable, and the syntactic facts about ergative verbs explain why (1a) and (1c) are grammatical sentences. Since the core arguments of ergative verbs can freely appear in both preverbal or postverbal positions, they also explain why relativization, the particle *saai* test and the *màaih* test can work with the preverbal NPs in these sentences.

The new findings generate two crucial questions that we need to answer: ‘are the postverbal arguments of ergative verbs in the V NP pattern S arguments or O arguments?’ and ‘are the preverbal arguments of ergative verbs S arguments or O arguments?’ So far we have just seen that the arguments of ergative verbs can appear either preverbally or postverbally. But we haven’t found out the status of these arguments. If the postverbal arguments of ergative verbs are O arguments, then the sentences can be considered to be transitive. On the other hand, if we find that the postverbal arguments are S arguments, then they are just intransitive constructions with VS word order. Similarly, it is important to know if the preverbal arguments of ergative verbs are S arguments or O arguments. If they are S arguments, then the ergative sentences with preverbal arguments are simply intransitive. If they are O arguments, then the sentences may be considered to be transitive.

First we will try to find out if the preverbal arguments are S or O arguments. One of the tests we can use is the ‘seem’ test (also known as subject-to-subject raising). The
assumption is that if a sentence is combined with a seem-type verb, the A or S argument of the sentence will also be the A or S argument of the combined sentence. The O argument or an oblique NP, however, cannot undergo the same pattern. For instance:

15).  *Seem* + a transitive sentence

    seem + [John kicks the ball]

   a. The A argument of kick becomes the A argument of the combined sentence
      John_i seems [ ____j to kick the ball].

   b. The O argument of kick becomes the A argument of the combined sentence
      * The ball_j seems [John to kick ____i].

16).  *Seem* + an intransitive sentence

    seem + [John looked at Mary]

   a. The S argument of look becomes the S argument of the combined sentence
      John_i seems [ ____i to look at Mary].

   b. The oblique NP of look becomes the S argument of the combined sentence
      * At Maryj seems [John to look ____i]

(15) shows that only the A argument can become the A of the combined sentence (15a). Raising the O argument (15b) is ungrammatical. (16) shows that the S argument can be raised to the higher clause, but the oblique NP cannot be raised.

The ‘seem’ test works the same way in Cantonese. Only the A and S arguments can be raised to the higher clause. But the O argument and the oblique NP cannot be raised. For example:
17). *chifuh* 'seem' + a transitive sentence

似乎 + 阿 John 踢緊 個 波。

chifuh + [Ah–John tek-gán go bō.]

seem John kick–PROG CL ball

'seem + John is kicking the ball.'

a. *The A argument of kick becomes the A argument of the combined sentence*

阿 John 似乎 踢緊 個 波。

Ah–John chifuh [____ tek-gán go bō.]

John seem ____ kick–PROG CL ball

'John seems to be kicking the ball.'

b. *The O argument of kick becomes the A argument of the combined sentence*

*個 波 似乎 阿 John 踢緊 ____。

*Go bō chifuh [Ah–John tek-gán ____.]

CL ball seem John kick–PROG ____

*The ball seems [John to kick.]*

18). *chifuh* 'seem' + an intransitive sentence

似乎 + 游水 對 你 晚 身體 好。

chifuh + [yauhséui deui léih ge sântái hōu.]

seem swimming for 2ND SG POSS body good

'seem + swimming is good for your body.'

a. *The S argument of look becomes the S argument of the combined sentence*

游水 似乎 對 你 晚 身體 好。

Yauhséui chifuh + [____ deui léih ge sântái hōu.]

Swimming seem ____ for 2ND SG POSS body good

'Swimming seems to be good for your body.'

---

4 This sentence may sound grammatical if there is a pause between go bo ‘the ball’ and chifuh ‘seem’.
b. *The oblique NP of look becomes the S argument of the combined sentence*

```
* 你 眼 身體 似乎 游水 對 __ 好。
* Léih ge sántái chifuh + [yáuhséui deui __ hóu.]
  2ND SG POSS body seem swimming for __ good
* ‘Your body seems swimming for good.’
```

(17) shows that the A argument can be raised to the higher clause (17a), but the O argument cannot be raised (17b). Similarly, (18) shows that the S argument can be raised to the higher clause (18a), but the oblique NP cannot be raised (18b).

If we apply this test to ergative sentences with preverbal arguments, we can determine if the preverbal arguments of ergative verbs are S arguments or O arguments. If the preverbal arguments can be raised to become the S arguments of the combined sentences, the preverbal arguments should be S arguments. If they cannot become the arguments of *seem*, the preverbal arguments should be O arguments.

19). a. 似乎 + 併 老豆 死嘅。
   chifuh + kéuih lóuhdauh sěi-jó.
   seem 3RD SG father die-PFT
   ‘His/her father died.’

b. 併 老豆 似乎 ___ 死嘅。
   [Kéuih lóuhdauh] chifuh [___ sěi-jó].
   3RD SG father seem ___ die-PFT
   ‘His/Her father seems to have died.’

20). a. 似乎 + 我嘅 際 船 沉嘅。
   Chifuh + ngóhdeih dī syuhm chahm-jó.
   seem 1ST PL CL boat sink-PFT
   ‘Our boats sank.’
Both (19) and (20) show that the preverbal arguments of the ergative verbs can be raised to the argument position of *seem*. This leads to the conclusion that the preverbal arguments of ergative verbs in the NP V pattern are S arguments.

The second question we need is answer is whether the postverbal arguments of ergative verbs are 0 arguments or S arguments. To do that, we will use coordination as a test. *Tühngmâaih* ‘and, also’ is a conjunction that works like ‘and’ in English. It conjoins two sentences that share the same subject (A or S arguments). For example:

21). a. 我去銀行入錢, 同埋買**食品**。

b.*我踢個波,**亦**同埋買**食品**。

In (21a), the A argument in the second clause is interpreted as *ngôh* ‘I’, which is the A argument of the first clause. (21b) shows that the O argument in the first clause cannot be the antecedent of the gap in the second clause. So this pattern of coordination in Cantonese is the same as the *and* coordination in English. Given this fact, we can
examine the subjecthood/objecthood of the postverbal arguments of ergative verbs by conjoining an ergative sentence as the first clause with a transitive clause as the second clause. If the gap in the second clause can retrieve its interpretation from the postverbal NP of the ergative sentence, then it shows that the postverbal NP functions like a shared subject (A or S arguments). But if the gap in the second clause cannot retrieve its meaning from the postverbal argument, then it shows that the postverbal argument is not an S argument. It should be an O argument. Compare:

22). a. 併 老豆 死吃，同埋 ____ 留 底吃 好
Kéuih lóuhduah séi-jó, tühngmàaih ____ lau dai-jó hóu
3RD SG father die-PFT and ____ leave down-PFT very

多 遺產。
dō wailchan.
much inheritance
‘His father died and left a large inheritance.’

b. 死吃 併 老豆，同埋 ____ 留 底吃
Séi-jó [kéuih lóuhduah], tühngmàaih ____*i lauh dai-jó
die-PFT 3RD SG father and ____ leave down-PFT

好 多 遺產。
hóu dō wailchan.
very much inheritance
* ‘His/her father died and left a large inheritance.’
‘His/her father died and (someone) left a large inheritance.’

23).a. 我地 的 船 沉吃，同埋 ____ 撞 晒
[Ngóhdeih dī syuhn], chahm-jó, tühngmàaih ____i jong saai
1ST PL CL boat sink-PFT and ____ hit all

落 海 底。
lohk hóih dáih
down sea bottom
‘Our boat sank, and hit the bottom of the sea.’
From the previous discussion we learned that the preverbal arguments of ergative verbs are S arguments, and so they can function as the shared subject (A or S argument) in coordination. Thus, in (22a) and (23a) the gaps in the second clauses can get their meanings from the preverbal NPs. However, when we conjoin an ergative sentence with postverbal arguments and a transitive sentence, as in (22b) and (23b), the outcomes are not the same. The gaps in the second clauses in (22b) and (23b) cannot retrieve their interpretations from the first clauses. This shows that the postverbal arguments of ergative verbs cannot be S arguments. They should be considered to be O arguments.

Then how about (1b) and (1d), where the arguments are in the SVX pattern? How do we explain these sentences, and are these sentences transitive or intransitive? To explain these sentences, we must also take a look at another syntactic process: possessor ascension.

### 6.5 Possessor Ascension

Possessor ascension is a type of raising operation that ‘raises the possessor out of a NP, giving it the grammatical relation that was initially associated with the larger NP.’ (O’Grady 2003). In many languages with this operation, the pattern is often called the ‘double subject’ or ‘double object’ pattern. Languages differ in terms of which core
argument(s) can undergo possessor ascension. Japanese, for example, can only allow the possessor of an S argument to be raised out of its larger NP.

24). a. No possessor ascension (S argument)

[Mary-no kami-ga] kuroi.
Mary-poss hair-NOM black-DECL
‘Mary’s hair is black.’

b. With possessor ascension of (24a)

Mary-ga [ ____ kami-ga] kuroi.
Mary-NOM ____ hair-NOM black-DECL
‘MARY’s hair is black.’

25). a. No possessor ascension (O argument)

Watashi wa Mary-no ashi-o tsukanda.
1SG TOP Mary-poss leg-ACC grab-PST
‘I grabbed Mary’s leg’

b. With possessor ascension of (25a)

*Watashi wa Mary-o [ ____ ashi-o] tsukanda.
1SG TOP Mary-acc leg-ACC grab-PST
‘I grabbed Mary by the leg.’

As we can see from (24a) and (24b), the possessor NP Mary changes its case marking from genitive to nominative, which is the same case marking as the larger NP it was originally in. This operation causes the sentence to have two nominative NPs. On the other hand, the possessor NP embedded within the O argument cannot be turned into an accusative NP, as shown in (25b).

In contrast, some languages allow the possessors of both S and O arguments to be raised. Korean is one of these languages (data adopted from O’Grady 2003).
26). a. No possessor ascension (S argument)

[Chinkwu-uy son-i] aphu-ta.
friend-POSS hand-NOM hurt-DECL
‘My friend’s hand hurts.’

b. With possessor ascension of (26a)

Chinkwu-ka [____ son-i] aphu-ta.
friend-NOM ____ hand-NOM hurt-DECL
‘MY FRIEND’S hand hurts.’

27). a. No possessor ascension (O argument)

John-NOM Mary-POSS hand-ACC grab-PST-DECL
‘John grabbed Mary’s hand.’

b. With possessor ascension of (27a)

John-NOM Mary-ACC ____ hand-ACC grab-PST-DECL
‘John grabbed MARY’S hand.’

(26) and (27) show us that the possessors of both the S argument (chinkwu ‘friend’) and the O argument (Mary) can be changed from the possessor marking to either the nominative marking (26b) or the accusative marking (27b). Though the sentences before and after possessor ascension look very similar, there are some differences pragmatically and syntactically.

Pragmatically, the raised NPs become more contrastive than the unraised ones (Fox 1981). Though both sentences describe the same situation, the raised possessor NPs become the highlight or the focus. For example, in a typical conversation, (24b) is rarely used. But when a question such as: ‘whose hair is black?’ is asked, (24b) becomes a
possible answer. A similar situation is found in (26). While (26a) describes what happens to the hand as a whole, (26b) shows empathy towards the raised NP *chinkwu* ‘my friend’.

In addition to the pragmatic differences between a sentence that undergoes possessor ascension and a sentence that has no possessor ascension, this operation also plays a role on the syntactic level. What is so significant about this operation is that the original possessor NP embedded in a larger possessive NP is turned into a core argument of a verb (manifested by the change in case marking, for instance). The possessed NP, though seemingly maintaining its case marking, word order, etc., loses its original grammatical relation to the verb. Abstractly speaking, the possessed NP is somehow ‘bumped’ away from its original relation to the verb. Using the term in Relational Grammar, the possessed NP becomes a chomeur (lit. unemployed). The term chomeur, as mentioned previously in Chapter four when we discuss some properties of passivization, is used to describe the agent NP in a passive sentence. This implies that the ‘bumped’ NP in the possessor ascension pattern should behave syntactically the same as the agent NP in a passive sentence: both are oblique NPs. How do we show that the possessed NP is turned into an oblique NP, when the case marking (at least in Japanese and Korean) remains the same? Do we have any independent evidence to support this claim?

6.5.1 PASSIVIZATION

There are some sentences which can show us the status of these possessed NPs. One of them is passivization. Passivization turns an O argument of a transitive sentence
into an S argument, and the original A argument becomes an oblique NP. It is found that in Korean, only one of the NPs in a sentence with possessor ascension can undergo passivization. (28a, c & d) from Chun 1986 (My translation).

28). a. *No possessor ascension*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{John-i} & & \text{[Kim Yang-ey} & \text{son-ul]} & \text{cap-at-ta.} \\
\text{John-NOM} & & \text{Kim Yang-POSS} & \text{hand-ACC} & \text{hold-PST-DECL}
\end{align*}
\]

‘John held Kim Yang’s hand.’

b. *With possessor ascension*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{John-i} & & \text{Kim Yang-ul} & \text{son-ul} & \text{cap-at-ta.} \\
\text{John-NOM} & & \text{Kim Yang-ACC} & \text{hand-ACC} & \text{hold-PST-DECL}
\end{align*}
\]

‘John held Kim Yang by her hand.’

c. *Passivization applied to the raised possessor NP*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Kim Yang-i} & & \text{John-eyuyhaese} & \text{son-ul} & \text{cap-hi-et-ta.} \\
\text{Kim Yang-NOM} & & \text{John-by} & \text{hand-ACC} & \text{hold-PASS-PST-DECL}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Kim Yang got her hand held by John.’

d. *Passivization applied to the possessed NP*

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{*Son-i} & & \text{John-eyuyhaese} & \text{Kim Yang-ul} & \text{cap-hi-et-ta.} \\
\text{hand-NOM} & & \text{John-by} & \text{Kim Yang-ACC} & \text{hold-PASS-PST-DECL}
\end{align*}
\]

‘The hand was held of Kim Yang.’

These sentences clearly show how passivization works with possessive ascension. In contrast to the raised possessor, the possessed NP cannot undergo passivization. From the fact that the possessed NP cannot be passivized, we should conclude that the possessed NP is no longer the O argument of the verb. It is an oblique NP.
6.5.2 Subject-to-object raising

Another piece of evidence to show the syntactic difference between the two equally marked NPs is in the subject-to-object raising pattern. Here is an example from Japanese (adopted from O’Grady 2003).

29). a. Without subject-to-object raising or possessor ascension

Yamada-wa [Mary-no kao-ga kawaii-to] omot-ta.
Yamada-TOP Mary-poss face-NOM cute-COMP think-PST
‘Yamada thought that Mary’s face is cute.’

b. With possessor ascension

Yamada-TOP Mary-NOM face-NOM cute-COMP think-PST
‘Yamada thought that Mary’s face is cute.’

c. With subject-to-object ascension of the raised possessor

Yamada-wa Mary-o [___ kao-ga kawaii-to] omot-ta.
Yamada-TOP Mary-ACC ___ face-NOM cute-COMP think-PST
‘Yamada thought that Mary’s face is cute.’

d. With subject-to-object ascension of the possessed NP

Yamada-TOP face-ACC Mary-NOM ___ cute-COMP think-PST
‘Yamada thought that Mary’s face is cute.’

In this set of examples, after possessor ascension has taken place, the possessor NP can be raised to the higher clause (indicated by the change of case marking from nominative to accusative) (29c). The sentence is perfectly grammatical. On the other hand, when the possessed NP is raised to the higher clause after possessor ascension (also indicated by the morphological change) (29d), the sentence becomes ungrammatical. This shows us
that though the possessed NP has the same case marking as the possessor NP, they have
different syntactic behaviors. The possessed NP can no longer participate in operations
that target core arguments.

In this section, we tried to present some syntactic evidence for the possessor
ascension operation. It was shown that this operation can be applied to the S or the O
argument. When this operation is applied, the possessor NP receives the grammatical
relation that was once given to the larger NP. At the same time, the findings presented
above show that the original possessed NP is turned into an oblique NP (or chomeur). It
loses its grammatical relation to the verb (although the case marking, word order, etc.
may remain the same), and can no longer participate in syntactic processes that apply to
core arguments. These are some of the behaviors that possessor ascension is associated
with. In the next section, more properties of this operation will be discussed.

6.5.3 Other important properties of possessor ascension

Besides the syntactic facts given above, more constraints of processor ascension
will be outlined in this section. First, though it was mentioned that either the S or O
argument can undergo possessor ascension, this statement is not entirely true. Let’s
compare the following sentences:

24). a. No possessor ascension (S argument)

[Mary-no kami-ga] kuroi.
Mary-POSS hair-NOM black-DECL
‘Mary’s hair is black.’
b. With possessor ascension of (24a)

Mary-ga [ ___ kami-ga] kuroi.  
Mary-NOM ___ hair-NOM black-DECL  
‘MARY’s hair is black.’

30). a. Without possessor ascension

[Mary-no kodomo-ga] asonde-imasu.  
Mary-POSS children-NOM playing-are  
‘Mary’s children are playing.’

b. With possessor ascension of (30a)

Mary-NOM ___ children-NOM playing-are  
‘Mary’s children are playing.’

c. Without possessor ascension

[Mary-no inu-ga] hoe-ta.  
Mary-POSS dog-NOM bark-PST  
‘Mary’s dog barked.’

d. With possessor ascension of (30c)

Mary-NOM ___ dog-NOM bark-PST  
‘Mary’s dog barked.’

Both (24) and (30) are intransitive sentences. According to the generalization we mentioned earlier, all of them should be able to undergo possessor ascension in the same way. However, the sentences in (30) are clearly ungrammatical. So what causes the sentences to be ungrammatical? If we examine the predicates of both (24) and (30) closely, we should find that the predicate "kuroi ‘to be black’" in (24) is an ergative predicate, but the verbs "asobu ‘to play’" and "hoeru ‘to bark’" in (30) are unergative verbs.
either the O argument or the S argument of ergative predicates. More generally, the O argument and the S argument of an ergative predicate are the undergoer/theme argument of the predicates. This fact also explains why the A argument of a transitive predicate cannot undergo possessor ascension.

Second, as reported by Fox (1981: 326), possessor ascension is applied only to a possessive NP affected by an action when the possessor is also viewed as affected. Since the possessor is affected by that action, it can be understood as ‘a full participant in the action, like a direct object’ (p. 326). Therefore, cross-linguistically possessor ascension is always manifested in inalienable possession, kinship terms, and body-part possession. The following examples manifest this distinction (data adopted from (Chun 1986: 85) (My transcription and my gloss).

31). a. *Without possessor ascension (body-part)*

```
John-NOM Mary-POSS hand-ACC hold-PST-DECL
'John held Mary’s hand.'
```

b. *With possessor ascension of (31a)*

```
John-NOM Mary-ACC ____ hand-ACC hold-PST-DECL
'John held Mary’s hand.'
```

32). a. *Without possessor ascension (alienable possession)*

```
I-NOM John-POSS bag-ACC open-PST-DECL
'I opened John’s bag.'
```
b. With possessor ascension of (32a)

   I-NOM  John-ACC  ____  bag-ACC  open-PST-DECL
   ‘I opened John’s bag.’

(31) involves a body-part possession, and the possessive NP can undergo possessor ascension. On the other hand, (32), involving alienable possession, cannot allow the possessor to be raised out of the possessive NP.

6.6 Possessor Ascension in Cantonese

It was pointed out in sections 6.1 and 6.4 that ergative verbs in Cantonese take undergoers as their arguments. There are three positions where these arguments can be found: preverbally, postverbally and a mixture of both. Here are the examples we used so far.

1). a. The undergoer appears before the verb

小康社会  lóuhdauh  sée-jó.
Keuih  lóuhdauh  sée-jó.
3RD SG  father  die-PFT
‘S/he lost his/her father.’

b. The undergoer appears after the verb

小康社会  lóuhdauh  sée-jó.
Keuih  sée-jó  lóuhdauh
3RD SG  die-PFT  father
‘S/he lost his/her father.’
c. *The undergoer appears before the verb*

\[
\text{Ngóhdeih di syuhn chahm-jó.} \\
1^{st} \text{PL CL boat sink-PFT}
\]

‘Our boats sank.’

\[
\text{Jill di syuhn.} \\
\text{CL boat}
\]

As we explained earlier, the undergoers of these ergative verbs are often analyzed as the O arguments of their verbs. If we assume this to be right, then the sentences in (14) are in their most neutral position. We have also seen that ergative verbs in Cantonese can be raised to the preverbal position (section 6.4). So this explains why (1a) and (1c) are also acceptable in Cantonese. What is left to be solved are sentences (1b) and (1d). Why does a part of these NPs appear in the preverbal position? We believe the reason is because (1b) and (1d) are examples of how possessor ascension operates in Cantonese.

Besides being undergoers, the possessive NPs in (14) are a kinship term and an inalienable possession respectively. So they both meet the requirements for possession
ascension to apply. Because of the fact that Cantonese has no case marking or agreement, possessor ascension is expressed in terms of word order only. Let's take the verb séi 'to die' as an example. The undergoer of séi in the examples cited above is kéuîh lóuhduah 'his/her father'. Since this NP is an undergoer, it should start off in the O argument position, i.e., in the postverbal position (example 14).

14). Without possessor ascension & without the raising of the possessor

死啱 佢 老豆。
Séi-jó [kéuîh-∅ lóuhduah]
die-PFT 3RD SG-POSS father
'S/he lost his/her father.'

33). With possessor ascension & without the raising of the possessor

死啱 佢 [____ 老豆]。
Séi-jó kéuîh [____ lóuhduah]
die-PFT 3RD SG (O) ______ father
'S/he lost his/her father.'

Abstractly speaking, at this point the possessor kéuîh 's/he' has raised out of its possessive NP. Unfortunately this is homophonous to the sentence without possessor ascension because the ascended NP does not receive a change in case marking phonetically. But the evidence of having possessor ascension applied in this sentence lies in the fact that the possessor itself can now be raised to the preverbal position, as in (1b).
b). *With possessor ascension & with the raising of the possessor*

\[\text{Kéuih séi-jó lóuhdauh}
\text{3\textsuperscript{rd} SG die-PFT father}
\]

’S/he lost his/her father.’

Do we have any other evidence to support the claim that this is the possessor ascension pattern? Yes, we believe topicalization may help clarify our position. As we mentioned in section 6.5.2, possessor ascension turns the original possessed NP into a chomeur or an oblique. Because of that, topicalization is harder to carry out for that NP, unless it is interpreted to have a strong contrastive meaning. This phenomenon is reported in Korean (Chun 1986). It is also found in Cantonese.

34). a. *Topicalization of the possessed NP in (1b) (repeat of (9b))*

\[\text{Lóuhdauh, kéuih séi-jó.}
\text{Father 3\textsuperscript{rd} SG die-PFT}
\]

*‘Father, s/he lost.’

‘Father, he died.’

b). *Topicalization of the possessed NP in (1b) with a contrastive meaning*

\[\text{Lóuhdauh, kéuih séi-jó, mh haih a-má.}
\text{Father 3\textsuperscript{rd} SG die-PFT NEG COP mother}
\]

‘Father, not the mother, s/he lost.’

In order to topicalize the possessed NP in (1b), there must be a contrastive context in the sentence (34b). If the contrastive context is not there, as in (34a), the sentence is
ungrammatical. This situation matches the possessor ascension pattern reported by Chun for Korean.

There is another piece of evidence in Cantonese that can support the possessor ascension analysis. There are two ways to form possessive NPs in Cantonese. The colloquial pattern is the ‘NP classifier NP’ pattern, where the first NP is the possessor and the second NP is the possessed.

35). *Possessive NP with classifier*

a. 我 驾 車
   Ngóh ga chē
   1<sup>ST</sup> SG CL car
   ‘My car’

b. 你 本 書
   Léih bún syū
   2<sup>ND</sup> SG CL book
   ‘Your book’

The other way to form possessive NPs is to use the possessive marker ge, and there is no difference in meaning with the ‘classifier’ possessive pattern.

*Possessive NP with the possessive marker ge*

c. 我 指 車
   Ngóh ge chē
   1<sup>ST</sup> SG POSS car
   ‘My car’

d. 你 指 書
   Léih ge syū
   2<sup>ND</sup> SG POSS book
   ‘Your book’
We can substitute the classifier possessive pattern with the ge possessive pattern in (1d). We can assume that if the pattern in (1d) is not an example of possessor ascension, we should expect to find the same sentence with ge in place of the classifier for what we claimed was possessor ascension with raising. But if this pattern involves the possessive ascension operation, the sentence with the possessive marker ge should not be allowed because possessive markers in the possessive ascension pattern should be changed into the case marker of the larger NP (see examples (24), (26) and (27)).

14b). *No possessor ascension (with the possessive marker ge)*

```
沈均  我哘  咩  船。
Chahm-jó [ngóhdieh ge syuhn].
sink-PFT 1ST PL POSS boat

‘Our boat sank.’
```

36) *Applying possessor ascension with the raising of the possessor NP*

```
我哘  沈均  咩  船。
Ngóhdieh chahm-jó ge syuhn.
1ST PL sink-PFT POSS boat

*‘Our boat sank.’
‘The boat that we sank.’
```

1d) *Possessor ascension with the raising of the possessor NP (the ‘classifier’ pattern)*

```
我哘  沈均  咩  船。
Ngóhdieh chahm-jó dī syuhn.
1ST PL sink-PFT CL boat

‘Our boats sank.’
‘We sank the boats.’
```

(36) confirms what we claimed in this section, that the ability to raise just the possessor NP is a result of the possessor ascension operation. It shows us that the possessor NP
cannot be raised to the preverbal position, if it remains as the possessor of the larger NP. Yet, we find that the possessor can be raised in (1d). This tells us that abstractly something must have changed the possessor into the O argument of the verb *chahm* ‘to sink’ before it is raised. Though we cannot physically see a change, the possessor ascension analysis can explain what the Cantonese data has shown us.

### 6.7 Some ‘leftover’ problems

In section 6.2 we applied three syntactic tests to examine whether the following sentences are transitive or intransitive.

1. **The undergoer appears after the verb**

   a. *The undergoer appears after the verb*
   
   佢死咗老豆。
   
   Kēuih séi-jó lóuhdauh
   
   3<sup>rd</sup> SG die-PFT father
   
   ‘S/he lost his/her father.’

   b. *The undergoer appears after the verb*
   
   佢沉咗佢嘅船。
   
   Ngōhdeih chahm-jó dī syuhn.
   
   1<sup>st</sup> PL sink-PFT CL boat
   
   ‘Our boats sank.’
   
   ‘We sank the boats.’

   The results from relativization showed that the gap strategy was used to relativize these sentences. Therefore we concluded that the postverbal NPs were the O arguments of their verbs, and so the sentences should be transitive. The *saai* test showed that *saai* quantified the postverbal NPs, which should be another piece of evidence that the postverbal NPs were O arguments. The *māaih* test also indicated that *māaih* modified the
postverbal NPs, and the results pointed to the conclusion that the O arguments were O arguments of their verbs.

In the light of what we discussed in 6.5 on possessor ascension, the postverbal possessed NPs after possessive ascension should be treated as chomeurs or oblique NPs (in Cantonese they are the postverbal NPs in (1b) and (1d)). Logically speaking these postverbal NPs should not be quantified by saai, modified by màaih and relativized with the gap strategy because all these tests should not pick out any oblique NPs. So why do we see such a contradiction?

Chun (1986) finds that syntactic processes like quantifier float apply not just to final 2s in Relational Grammar terminology, but can also apply to 2-chomeurs as well. Final 2s are NPs that are turned into the O arguments of their verbs after a syntactic process. In the possessor ascension analysis, the ascended possessors are final 2s. 2-chomeurs, on the other hand, are NPs that are turned into chomeurs from a 2 relation, but they retain their 2 relation case marking. In the possessor ascension analysis, the possessed NPs after possessor ascension are 2-chomeurs (for a detailed treatment of this topic, see Chun 1986: 80-82). Following Chun’s analysis, we believe that saai and màaih, which are similar to the quantifier float pattern in Korean, can also modify 2-chomeurs in Cantonese.

The only problem that we can’t account for is the fact that postverbal oblique NPs can undergo relativization. As reported by O’Grady (2003), only the ascended possessor in Korean can undergo relativization.
37). *Data adopted from (O'Grady 2003)*

a. *Possessor ascension pattern:*

```
Chinkwu-ka son-i aphu-ta.
Friend-NOM hand-NOM hurt-DECL
'My friend's hand hurts.'
```

b. *Relativization of the first nominative marked noun*

```
[REL ___ son-i aphu-n] chinkwu.
___ hand-NOM hurt-REL friend
'My friend whose hand hurts'
```

c. *Relativization of the second nominative-marked noun*

```
* [REL Chinkwu-ka ___ aphu-n] son
  friend-NOM ___ hurt-REL hand
'The hand that/where my friend hurts.'
```

(37c) shows that it is not possible to relativize the possessed NP in the possessor ascension pattern, but relativizing the ascended NP is acceptable. The data in Cantonese do not seem to follow the same pattern.

**6.8 POSSIBLE EXTENSION OF THE POSSESSOR ASCENSION PATTERN IN CANTONESE**

In the previous section we used possessor ascension to analyze the ergative verb construction. But it seems that the possession ascension pattern can be found elsewhere. The ‘indirect passive construction’ in Cantonese can also be explained with it. In this section, we will describe the indirect passive construction and provide a possible analysis for it.

The assumption about passivization has always been that passive sentences are derived from their active counterparts (Perlmutter and Postal 1983: 9). Therefore, if bēi
is a passive marker in Cantonese and Mandarin, the sentences containing it should have corresponding active sentences. However, it was suggested by Hashimoto (1987) that some bei sentences do not have active counterparts. Here is the example given in Chapter five.

38). Passive Sentence (data in Mandarin)

我被他從身上偷了手錶。
Wo bei ta cong shen shang tou le shoubiao.

'My watch was stolen by him/her from my body.' (Lit: ‘I was robbed by him/her from my body of my watch.’)

In this sentence the person who owns the stolen watch is in the A argument position (subject), but is not understood as the entity directly affected by the action tou ‘to steal’. The O argument of tou ‘to steal’ is retained in the postverbal position. This sentence has no active counterpart (if bei is a passive construction). Based on the meaning of (38), the closest active equivalent is (39a), which should have (39b) as its passive counterpart.

39) a. Active Counterpart

他從我身上偷了我(的)手錶。
Ta cong wo shen shang tou le wo (de) shoubiao.

’S/he stole my watch from my body.’
b. **Passivizing (39a)**

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Wo} \ (\text{de}) \ \text{shoubiao} \ \text{bei} \ \text{ta} \ \text{cong} \ \text{wo} \ \text{shen} \ \text{shang} \ \text{tou} \\
&1^{\text{st}} \text{SG} \ (\text{POSS}) \ \text{watch} \ \text{bei} \ 3^{\text{rd}} \text{SG} \ \text{LOC} \ 1^{\text{st}} \text{SG} \ \text{body} \ \text{on} \ \text{steal}
\end{align*}
\]

"My watch was stolen by him/her from my body."

Sentences like (38) are generally known as indirect passives, where the S argument of the sentence can be seen as being affected by the action indirectly. This construction is also found in Cantonese. (40) is the equivalent of the Mandarin example in (38).

40). 我 置 他 見 我 身 上 偷 單 銀包。
\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Ngóh} \ \text{bei} \ \text{kéuh} \ \text{hái} \ \text{ngóh} \ \text{sânseuhng} \ \text{tâu-jó} \ \text{ngahnbáu}.
&1^{\text{st}} \text{SG} \ \text{bei} \ 3^{\text{rd}} \text{SG} \ \text{LOC} \ 1^{\text{st}} \text{SG} \ \text{body} \ \text{steal-PFT} \ \text{wallet}
\end{align*}
\]

"My watch was stolen by him/her from my body." (Lit: 'I was robbed from my body of my watch.')

Based on the tests we applied to the \textit{běi} construction in Chapter five, we argued that it is a passive construction in Cantonese. However, if sentences with \textit{běi} are passive sentences, how can we explain sentences such as (38) and (40), which seem to lack active counterparts?

We believe that the \textit{běi} construction is a passive in Cantonese and Mandarin, and that sentences like (38) and (40) have corresponding active counterparts. For (38), (39a) is its active counterpart, and for (40), it should look like this:
One may wonder why (39a) and (41) are the active counterparts of (38) and (40), because the passive of (39a) should be (39b), and (42) below should be the passivized version of (41).

We believe that both (38) and (39b) (the Mandarin examples) are the correct passive counterparts of (39a). Similarly, we argue that both (40) and (42) (the Cantonese equivalents) are the correct passive counterparts of (41). The only difference between (39b) and (42) on the one hand, and (38) and (40) on the other hand is that (39b) and (42) are the results of applying passivization directly to (39a) and (41) respectively, while (38) and (40) are the results of applying possessive ascension before passivization occurs in (39a) and (41).

Let’s focus our attention on the Cantonese data. As mentioned above, we claim that both (40) and (42) originate from (41). In (41), the A argument (the person who steals) is kēuih ‘he or she’. The O argument (the thing that undergoes the stealing) is the
NP ngóh ge ngahnbáu ‘my wallet’. Therefore, when passivization is directly applied to (41), the O argument becomes the S argument in the corresponding passive sentence, and the A argument kéuih ‘he or she’ becomes the NP marked by běi, as seen in (42). We can represent the process in the following table:

Table 6.2 Direct passive pattern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Sentence</th>
<th>kéuih ‘s/he’</th>
<th>ngóh ge ngahnbáu ‘my wallet’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After passivization</td>
<td>A argument</td>
<td>O argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblique NP</td>
<td>S argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the indirect passive sentence (40), we believe that possessor ascension is applied to the possessive NP in the active sentence (41) before passivization occurs. Here is how the process takes place. We begin with (41), and possessor ascension is first applied to the possessive NP (the O argument).

41). Regular active sentence

> kéuih hái ngóh sänseuhng tâu-jó [ngóh ge ngahnbáu] (O).

‘S/he stole my wallet from my body.’

43) a. Possessor ascension is applied to (41)

> kéuih hái ngóh sänseuhng tâu-jó ngóh [____]

‘S/he stole my wallet from my body.’
(43a) represents an intermediate construction that results from applying possessor ascension to (41). The possessor ṅgōh 'I' is ascended out of the possessive NP, so that the possessive marker ge is no longer needed. We have argued in section 6.5 that when possessor ascension is applied to a possessive NP, the possessor takes on the grammatical relation of the original possessive NP and the possessed NP is turned into a chomcur. Hence, the possessor ṅgōh 'I' in (41) becomes the O argument in (43a), and is now eligible to be passivized to become the S argument in the corresponding passive sentence. Simultaneously, the possessed NP ṅgahnbāu ‘wallet’ becomes an oblique NP in (43a) after possession ascension occurs (as discussed in section 6.6). After possession ascension is applied, passivization is then applied to (43a) to form (43b) (repeat of (40)).

43) b. Passivization in which the O argument becomes the S argument

My wallet was stolen by him/her from my body.'

Passivization turns ṅgōh ‘I’ (the O argument) into the S argument in the passive sentence, and the A argument kéuīh ‘he or she’ is turned into an oblique NP (marked by béi), as seen in (43b). The process can be represented as follows:
Using the possessor ascension analysis, the indirect passive construction in Cantonese can be explained and accounted for. We claim that indirect passive sentences like (38a) and (40) have corresponding active counterparts, unlike what Hashimoto claims (1987). The bei construction in this analysis is best regarded as a passive construction in Cantonese and Mandarin.

One may argue that ngôh ge ngahnbâu ‘my wallet’ is not an instance of inalienable possession and thus should not undergo possessor ascension. We believe that there are at least two reasons why possessor ascension can be applied to (41). First, as mentioned in section 6.5.3, possessor ascension is applied to NPs in which both the possessor NP and the possessed NP are fully affected by the same action. Clearly in (41), the action tau ‘to steal’ not only affects the wallet (the thing being stolen), it can also be viewed that the person who owns the wallet (ngôh ‘I’ in (41)) is also affected. Therefore, semantically (41) is eligible for possessor ascension to apply.

The second reason is that though possessor ascension is restricted to inalienable possession in many languages, this restriction seems to be lessened in the indirect passive pattern. We mentioned earlier that possessor ascension could only be applied to inalienable possession in Korean (see examples (24) and (25)). However, we find that
the indirect passive construction can be applied to alienable possessions pattern as well.

For example ((b) and (c) adopted from Hong 1991:218):

44). a. **Before possessor ascension and passivization**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Minswu-ka} & \quad \text{Swuni-uy} & \quad \text{ton-ul} & \quad \text{ppayas-ass-ta.} \\
\text{Minswu-NOM} & \quad \text{Swuni-POS} & \quad \text{money-ACC} & \quad \text{take away-PST-DECL} \\
\text{‘Minswu took away Swuni’s money.’}
\end{align*}
\]

b. **After possessor ascension and before passivization**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{*Minswu-ka} & \quad \text{Swuni-lul} & \quad \text{ton-ul} & \quad \text{ppayas-ass-ta.} \\
\text{Minswu-NOM} & \quad \text{Swuni-ACC} & \quad \text{money-ACC} & \quad \text{take away-PST-DECL} \\
\text{‘Minswu took away Swuni’s money.’}
\end{align*}
\]

b. **After possessor ascension and passivization**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Swuni-ka} & \quad \text{Minswu-eykey} & \quad \text{ton-ul} & \quad \text{ppayas-ki-ess-ta.} \\
\text{Swuni-NOM} & \quad \text{Minswu-by} & \quad \text{money-ACC} & \quad \text{take away-PASS-PST-DECL} \\
\text{‘Swuni was taken away money by Minswu.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(44) shows that the restriction on possessor ascension is weakened in the indirect passive construction. The possessive NP in (44a) is the O argument of the sentence (the undergoer). If we apply possessor ascension to it, the result turns out to be ungrammatical (44b) because *Swuni-uy ton-ul ‘Swuni’s money’ is an alienable possession. Interestingly though, the possessor NP *Swuni* can become the S argument of the indirect passive sentence (44c). In order for the possessor NP alone to be passivized, we believe that it has to ascend out of the possessive NP first. Possessor ascension changes the grammatical relation of the possessor into the O argument of the sentence, which is then eligible to be passivized. This shows that the possessor has actually
ascended abstractly (as seen in (44b)). Though there is a constraint on the application of possessor ascension, it seems to be relaxed in the indirect passive construction.

We suggest that the same is true in Cantonese. Although ngôh ge ngahnbau ‘my wallet’ is not an example of an inalienable possession, this constraint is bypassed and there it can be passivized into (43b).

This example of indirect passive in Cantonese reveals that possessor ascension is not just an abstract analysis to explain the transitivity of the Ergative Verb construction. It is also used in other independent patterns in Cantonese.

6.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter the Ergative Verb construction was thoroughly examined. Though the tests we suggested found out that the NP V NP ergative verb pattern should be considered to be transitive, more syntactic tests revealed that this pattern is more complex than one may imagine. Since our initial analysis did not turn out to our expectation. A different approach was called for. First, we found that when the arguments of ergative verbs were in the postverbal position, they behaved like O arguments. In contrast, preverbal arguments of ergative verbs behaved like S arguments. Moreover, it was suggested that the NP V NP pattern could best be explained by the possessor ascension analysis. It was argued that a possessor could be ascended to become a core argument, while leaving the possessed NP to become a chomeur (oblique NP). Therefore, the NP V NP pattern, from this analysis, was found to be SV Oblique. It was further suggested that the possessor ascension analysis played an important role to explain why there are two passive counterparts of the same active sentence.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the notion of transitivity in Cantonese from a syntactic point of view. Traditionally, transitivity has often been defined in terms of the number of required arguments in a sentence. Hence, a transitive sentence involves a verb that requires two arguments -- a subject and an object. An intransitive sentence, on the other hand, involves a verb that requires only one argument -- the subject. This way of defining transitivity may seem to be useful for languages like English, where there are multiple clues such as word order, case marking (for pronouns) and agreement (-s/-Ø) to help identify the grammatical relations. However, when the same definition is imported into studying Mandarin, Cantonese and various Chinese languages, the definition does not produce many fruitful insights. As seen in the review of the Chinese literature in Chapter three, there is no consensus among Chinese linguists in labeling syntactic constructions as either transitive or intransitive. Many of these linguists simply make grammatical judgments using solely their native-speaker intuitions. The lack of an objective way to define transitivity leads to the foundation of this dissertation. This dissertation intended to use different syntactic processes as objective tests to examine some Cantonese constructions. Although using syntactic tests to define the notion of
transitivity may be different from the traditional conception of transitivity, this dissertation can provide a new angle to the understanding of transitivity in Cantonese.

Throughout the dissertation, three syntactic tests were used to help define transitivity: the relativization test, the *saai* test and the *màaih* test. The relativization test was used because core arguments behave differently from peripheral arguments (oblique arguments) in Cantonese when these arguments are relativized. Syntactically, the gap strategy is used when a core argument is relativized. In contrast, the pronoun retention strategy is employed when a peripheral argument is relativized. Therefore, this test can help identify the status of a postverbal bare argument. If the gap strategy is used to relativize a postverbal argument, the argument is believed to be an O argument. The sentence is identified as transitive. But if the pronoun strategy is used, then the argument behaves like an oblique argument in terms of relativization, and the sentence is concluded to be intransitive.

The *saai* test was another useful test this dissertation used. *Saai* is a quantifying particle in Cantonese. Syntactically it quantifies either the S argument or the O argument of a sentence. Therefore when *saai* is used to test a construction, and it quantifies the postverbal argument, we would conclude that the postverbal argument behaves like an O argument, and the sentence is transitive. On the other hand, if *saai* cannot quantify a postverbal argument, the argument is then treated as an oblique argument syntactically and the sentence is intransitive.

*Màaih* behaves similarly to *saai*. *Màaih* is a modifying particle with the meaning of ‘along with’ or ‘in addition’. Syntactically, it also modifies the S argument and the O
argument. Thus, if it can modify a postverbal NP, this supports the idea that the NP is an O argument, and hence the sentence is transitive. If māaih cannot modify a postverbal NP, the NP is said to be an oblique NP, and the sentence containing this NP is intransitive.

Eight constructions in Cantonese were tested in this dissertation. The first construction examined was the Verbs of Motion (MV) construction. These are verbs that take bare NPs of location without any intervening coverb/preposition. Of the five verbs tested in this category, it was found that heui ‘to go’, làih ‘to come’ and sihk ‘to eat (at a location)’ were consistently used as transitive verbs. Yahp ‘to enter’ and chēut ‘to be out/exit’ were consistently used as intransitive verbs, though in some contexts they were also used transitively.

The second construction was the Locative Verb (LV). These verbs are verbs of posture that take bare NPs denoting a location. Two verbs, namely choh ‘to sit’ and fan ‘to sleep’, were examined. They were found to be transitive in nature.

The third construction was the Verb with an adverbial Object (AOV). These verbs take bare adverbial objects. Four verbs were tested (kāt ‘to cough’, gāaihsīk ‘to explain’, jyuh ‘to live’ and pau ‘to run’) and the results indicated that the adverbial objects are O arguments and therefore the verbs are transitive.

The fourth construction was the passive (bēi) construction. Some Chinese linguists argue that bēi can be interpreted as a verb and so the bēi construction can be a subtype of the serial verb construction in Cantonese. The results from various syntactic tests showed that bēi is no longer a verb and the NP following immediately after bēi is an
oblique NP. Therefore, the *bei* construction was concluded to be a passive construction in Cantonese.

The fifth construction under examination was the *jeung* construction. *Jeung* was historically a verb, and there have been many different analyses for this construction. Some called it a preposition; some claimed that it was the first verb in a serial verb construction, etc. So it was tested in this dissertation using syntactic tests and it was found that *jeung* is no longer a real verb. Yet the NPs immediately follow it were found to be core arguments. Therefore, the results from this dissertation support the analysis suggested by Hopper and Thompson (1980) that *jeung* is an object marker, and it fronts the O argument of a transitive verb.

The sixth construction was the VO compound construction. Cantonese has some verbal compounds that are often translated as intransitive verbs in English and yet may be interpreted as combinations of a verb and a noun conjoined together by syntax. Therefore, close examinations of these VO compounds were called for. Six randomly picked VO compounds were examined, and it was found that these compounds behaved differently from the syntactic tests we used in this dissertation. Of the six VO compounds chosen in this dissertation, two of them, namely *dāam-sām* ‘to worry’ and *tāuh-ji* ‘to invest’ were found to be true VO compounds. That is to say, these two verbs behaved as single units in all the tests. On the other hand, *sihk-faaehn* ‘to eat rice/a meal’ was found to be a verb phrase. The other three VO units: *duhk-syū* ‘to study’, *hōi-dōu* ‘to operate on’ and *chēut-māau* ‘to cheat’ seemed to behave as single units in some tests, while behaving like verb phrases in other tests. We suggested two possible analyses to
account for these facts. One of the analyses proposed that they were in the process of
turning from verb phrases into VO compounds. This is why these three VO units
behaved differently with respect to different syntactic tests. The other analysis suggested
that there may be two homophonous forms for each of these three units. In this analysis,
one of the homophonous forms was a true VO compound, and the other form is a VO
verb phrase. In some of the tests, the VO compounds were tested. In other occasions, it
was the VO verb phrases that were tested. Therefore, the tests yielded inconclusive
results.

The seventh construction we tested was the coverb construction. Similar to the
bei construction, different linguists have different analyses of this construction. Some
believe that coverbs are prepositions, while others argue that they are a subtype of the
serial verb construction. This dissertation tested four coverb sentences in Cantonese.
The results showed that the NPs marked by the coverbs are oblique NPs, but the coverbs
were found to be capable of taking certain aspect markers. The position we took in this
dissertation was that coverbs are undergoing the process of grammaticalization. That is,
these verbs are in the process of changing from full verbs to prepositions. Given enough
time, they may lose their ability to take aspect markers.

The last construction we tested was the ergative construction. Ergative verbs are
verbs that take undergoers as their arguments, and these undergoers can appear either
preverbally or postverbally. When the undergoer NP involves a possessive NP, the
possessor NP can be stranded away from its head to appear preverbally. Two ergative
verbs were used for examination: séi ‘to die’ and chahm ‘to sink’. It was found that when
the NP was in the preverbal position, it behaved like an S argument. When the NP was in the postverbal position, the NP behaved like an O argument. As for the stranded possessor, we believed that the possessor ascension analysis could best explain the phenomenon. We argued in this dissertation that when the possessor NP is moved to the preverbal position while leaving the possessed NP in the postverbal position, the construction actually involves having the possessor ascended out of the possessive NP. It is then raised to the preverbal position. At the same time, the possessed NP becomes an oblique NP. This analysis thus argued that this pattern is intransitive, though structurally it resembles any typical transitive sentence.

This dissertation provided a different way of looking at transitivity from the traditional notion of transitivity. By using syntactic tests, we believe that transitivity in Cantonese can be accurately captured because it is not defined using personal intuitions and feelings.
Appendix

Transcriptions and tones

This dissertation follows the system in Matthews and Yip (1996), which is also known as the Yale romanization system. Here are the phonetic values of the alphabet used in the Yale system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>Yale</th>
<th>IPA</th>
<th>Yale</th>
<th>IPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>p^h</td>
<td>i (before η, k)</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>yu</td>
<td>y:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>u (before ng, k)</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>t^h</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>eu</td>
<td>e:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>eu (before n, t)</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k^h</td>
<td>a (with final consonant)</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ng</td>
<td>ng</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>a (no final consonant)</td>
<td>a:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>aa</td>
<td>a:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tone: In this system, there are six distinct tones, with the assumption that the high level and the high falling tones are not distinctive. The tones are listed as follows (using \textit{yau} as an example).

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone Type</th>
<th>Example Word</th>
<th>IPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level</td>
<td>yāu ‘worry’; ‘rest’ (in compounds)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High rising</td>
<td>yāu ‘paint’ (noun)</td>
<td>35/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid level</td>
<td>yau ‘thin’</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low falling</td>
<td>yāuh ‘oil’; ‘swim’ (verb)</td>
<td>21/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low rising</td>
<td>yāuh ‘have’; ‘friend’</td>
<td>23/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level</td>
<td>yauh ‘again’; ‘right (hand)’</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
References


Cheung, Samuel Hung-nin 1972. Cantonese As Spoken in Hong Kong. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong.


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