

THE SYNTAX OF TWO APPROXIMATIVES IN CANTONESE:
DISCONTINUOUS CONSTRUCTIONS FORMED WITH ZAI6¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines various grammatical properties of two postverbal approximative adverbs in Cantonese, viz *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6*, and the discontinuous constructions they constitute. *Mat1zai6* is used to describe the frequency or degree denoted by the predicate in negative form while *gam3zai6* focuses on the process approaching the endpoint of the event. Both of them are heads projected above the predicate underlyingly and their occurrence in the sentence-final position is a result of movement of the entire predicate step by step on the surface. Postverbal and preverbal adverbs form discontinuous adverbial phrases in Cantonese, which can be stacked and should be in a strict hierarchical order in the clausal structure. The findings of this paper may shed light on the syntax of Cantonese postverbal adverbs and the theory of discontinuous constructions.

SUBJECT KEYWORDS

Cantonese, syntax, adverbs, discontinuous construction, analyticity

1. INTRODUCTION

The two postverbal elements in Hong Kong Cantonese (hereafter called ‘Cantonese’) discussed in this paper are *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6*,² as shown in (1) and (2), respectively. In (1), *mat1zai6* can be roughly translated as ‘(not) much at all, hardly ... at all’ and is glossed as ‘MATZAI’ while in (2), *gam3zai6* can be translated as ‘almost’ in English and is simply glossed as ‘GAMZAI’ in our examples.

- (1) 呢班懶鬼冇上堂乜滯。 (mat1zai6)
Nei1 baan1 laan5gwai2 mou5 soeng5 tong4 mat1zai6.
 this CI lazybones not go lecture MATZAI
 ‘This group of lazybones hardly went to class at all.’
- (2) 佢做起篇文咁滯。 (gam3zai6)
Keoi5 zou6-hei2 pin1 man2 gam3zai6.
 he do-finish CI paper GAMZAI
 ‘He has almost finished the paper.’

According to grammarians like Yuan et al (1960), Gao (1980), Zeng (1989), Peyraube (1997), Cheng (1997), and Wang and Zhou (2000), *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6* are treated as postverbal adverbs (also known as ‘right-dislocated adverbs’ or ‘right-dislocated adverbials’). For the ease of discussion in this paper, these two postverbal elements in Cantonese are classified as postverbal adverbs. As postverbal adverbs are in general not permitted in Mandarin Chinese, their occurrence in Cantonese is regarded as a significant grammatical difference between Cantonese and Mandarin. In addition to the two postverbal adverbs *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6* being discussed in this paper, *sin1* ‘first’ in (3) is another adverb that occurs postverbally in Cantonese. Its counterpart in Mandarin, namely *xiān* ‘first’ in (4), must occur in the preverbal position.

- (3) 佢飲湯先。 (Cantonese)
Keoi5 jam2 tong1 sin1.
 he drink soup first
 ‘He drank soup first.’
- (4) 他(先)喝湯(*先)。 (Mandarin)
*Tā (xiān) hē tāng (*xiān).*
 he first drink soup first
 ‘He drank soup first.’

It is also widely claimed in the literature that Cantonese has a ‘rich’ system of postverbal adverbs and function words compared with other Chinese dialects (Yuan et al 1960, Cheung 1972, Peyraube 1997, among many others).

Although the existence of such postverbal adverbs is one of the ‘unique’ features of Cantonese, to my knowledge there have been no thorough studies of the syntactic properties of these elements.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the syntactic properties of postverbal adverbs in Cantonese, focusing on *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6* and the discontinuous constructions they constitute. The findings of this paper will hopefully shed light on the syntax of Cantonese postverbal adverbs and the theory of discontinuous constructions.³

2. GRAMMATICAL PROPERTIES OF *MAT1ZAI6*

In Cantonese, *mat1zai6* is associated with a meaning of inadequacy, which is used to describe the inadequate frequency or the inadequate degree conveyed by the predicate, and serves as an approximative.⁴ The examples below show that *mat1zai6* can follow a verbal predicate, such as *siu3* ‘laugh’ in (5), and an adjectival predicate, such as *goulhing3* ‘happy’ in (6).

- (5) 佢唔笑乜滯。
Keoi5 m4 siu3 mat1zai6.
 he not laugh MATZAI
 ‘He does not laugh much at all.’
- (6) 佢唔高興乜滯。
Keoi5 m4 goulhing3 mat1zai6.
 he not happy MATZAI
 ‘He is not too happy at all.’

An important observation is that *mat1zai6* must co-occur with a negative marker. Without the negative marker, such as in (7), the judgment is deviant.⁵ In addition to the negative marker *m4* ‘not’, *mat1zai6* can also co-occur with the negative marker *mou5* ‘not’, as in (8). The data presented here lead to the conclusion that *mat1zai6* should be analyzed as a negative polarity item that appears only in a negative environment in a sentence, similar to *any* and *at all* in English that both have to co-occur with a negated predicate.⁶

- (7) *佢笑乜滯。
 **Keoi5 siu3 mat1zai6*.
 he laugh MATZAI
- (8) 佢冇笑乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 siu3 mat1zai6.
 he not laugh MATZAI
 'He did not laugh much at all.'

Furthermore, there is a locality condition that requires *mat1zai6* and the negative marker to be in the same clause. Example (10) shows that the judgment is deviant if *mat1zai6* is in the embedded clause while the negative marker *m4* 'not' is in the matrix clause.

- (9) 我知道〔佢唔去乜滯〕。
Ngo5 zildou3 [keoi5 m4 heoi3 mat1zai6].
 I know he not go MATZAI
 'I know that he does not go much at all.'
- (10) *我唔知道〔佢去乜滯〕。
 **Ngo5 m4 zildou3 [keoi5 heoi3 mat1zai6]*.
 I not know he go MATZAI
 '*I do not know that he goes much at all.'

As a postverbal adverb, *mat1zai6* occurs in the sentence-final position, following the object, if any. For example, *mat1zai6* follows the object *bou6 jing2jan3 gei1* 'the photocopy machine' in (11) while it occurs after the indirect object *keoi5* 'he' in the dative/inverted double object construction in (12). Example (13) further shows that *mat1zai6* can follow a trace, i.e. 't', left by the fronted object.

- (11) 個秘書冇用部影印機乜滯。
Go3 bei3syu1mou5 jung6 bou6 jing2jan3 gei1 mat1zai6.
 Cl secretary not use Cl photocopy machine MATZAI
 'The secretary did not use the photocopy machine much at all.'

- (12) 學校冇畀錢佢乜滯。
Hok6hau6 mou5 bei2 cin2 keoi5 mat1zai6.
 school not give money he MATZAI
 ‘The school did not give him much money at all.’
- (13) 部影印機，個秘書冇用 *t* 乜滯。
Bou6 jing2jan3 gei1, go3 bei3syu1 mou5 jung6 t mat1zai6.
 Cl photocopy machine Cl secretary not use MATZAI
 ‘As for the photocopy machine, the secretary did not use it much at all.’

If *mat1zai6* follows a nominal object, the nominal should be either definite (as in (14)) or generic (as in (15)). Example (16) indicates that if the nominal object is indefinite, the judgment is unacceptable.⁷

- (14) 佢冇睇呢三本書乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 tai2 ni1 saam1-bun2 syu1 mat1zai6.
 he not read this three-Cl book MATZAI
 ‘He hardly read these three books at all.’
- (15) 佢冇睇書乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 tai2 syu1 mat1zai6.
 he not read book MATZAI
 ‘He did not read books much at all.’
- (16) *佢冇睇三本書乜滯。
 **Keoi5 mou5 tai2 saam1-bun2 syu1 mat1zai6.*
 he not read three-Cl book MATZAI
 ‘?He did not read three books at all.’

Example (17) illustrates that *mat1zai6* is incompatible with frequency phrases, such as *saam1 ci3* ‘three times’ in (17), which are interpreted as indefinites.

- (17) *佢冇去三次乜滯。
 **Keoi5 mou5 heoi3 saam1 ci3 mat1zai6.*
 he not go three time MATZAI
 ‘*He did not go three times at all.’

In terms of grammatical relations, *mat1zai6* is an adverbial that is used to modify the predicate, particularly the frequency of the action denoted by the verbal predicate, for instance, (11), or the degree denoted by the verbal or adjectival predicate, for instance, (14) and (6). In other words, when the predicate is verbal, *mat1zai6* may count the number of the event or quantify over the degree of the event; when the predicate is adjectival, it simply quantifies over the degree of the state or quality.

Given that *mat1zai6* is a negative polarity item, the negative marker cannot be omitted in the sentence and is used to negate the frequency or the degree associated with *mat1zai6*. For example, the negative marker *mou5* ‘not’ in (18) negates the frequency of going instead of the event of going. From a semantic point of view, we may say that the scope of *mat1zai6* is under the negative marker.

- (18) 佢冇去乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 heoi3 mat1zai6.
 he not go MATZAI
 ‘He did not go much at all.’

Elements having a wide scope reading should be structurally higher than those having a narrow scope reading. In this vein, the scopal relationship between the negative marker and *mat1zai6* can be defined in terms of c-commanding. I assume that *mat1zai6* is projected above the verb phrase VP in the clausal structure and the negative marker is located in a position that c-commands *mat1zai6*.⁸ The underlying syntactic representation of (11), as repeated in (19), can be informally sketched in (20).

- (19) 個秘書冇用部影印機乜滯。
Go3 bei3syu1mou5 jung6 bou6 jing2jan3 gei1 mat1zai6.
 CI secretary not use CI photocopy machine MATZAI
 ‘The secretary did not use the photocopy machine much at all.’
- (20) Subject [Negation [*mat1zai6* VP]]

In (20), *mat1zai6* is projected above the verb phrase *jung6 bou6 jing2jan3 gei1* ‘use the photocopy machine’ and hence precedes the verb phrase, according to Kayne’s (1994) theory of word order. To derive the right word order in Cantonese, I assume that the verb phrase in (20), containing the verb and the object, if any, undergoes leftward movement to a position between the negation and *mat1zai6*, as in (21). After VP movement takes place, *mat1zai6* is in the sentence-final position, deriving the so-called ‘right dislocated’ word order.⁹

- (21) Subject [Negation VP [*mat1zai6* _____]]
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Let us briefly summarize what we have discussed in this section. The postverbal element *mat1zai6* is an adverbial that is used to modify the frequency or the degree denoted by the predicate. Underlyingly, *mat1zai6* is projected above the verb phrase and c-commanded by the negation. The verb phrase undergoes movement, deriving the postverbal word order of *mat1zai6* on the surface.

3. GRAMMATICAL PROPERTIES OF *GAM3ZAI6*

The postverbal adverb *gam3zai6* can be translated as ‘almost, nearly’ (Rao et al. 1981, Zhang and Ni 1999). It is used to indicate that the quantity or the degree expressed by the predicate is close to being fully realized (Mai and Tan 1997, Cheng 1997). Similar to *mat1zai6*, the postverbal adverb *gam3zai6* can also be analyzed as an approximative.

Normally *gam3zai6* should co-occur with resultative verbs, such as *gyun4* ‘finish’ in (22), and some verbal particles that can mark the result of the event, such as *sai3* ‘all, finish’ in (23). In terms of eventualities, the predicates in (22) and (23) are telic, indicating accomplishments with a natural endpoint. (24) shows that the judgment is deviant if resultative verbs or verbal particles are omitted. The unacceptability is due to the lack of an explicitly coded natural endpoint of the event of paying the loan (*gung1 lau2*, lit.: ‘afford a house’).¹⁰

- (22) 佢供完層樓咁滯。
Keoi5 gung1-jyun4 cang4 lau2 gam3zai6.
 he afford-finish Cl house GAMZAI
 ‘He has almost paid off the loan for the flat.’
- (23) 佢供晒層樓咁滯。
Keoi5 gung1-saai3 cang4 lau2 gam3zai6.
 he afford-all Cl house GAMZAI
 ‘He has almost paid off the entire loan for the flat.’
- (24) *佢供層樓咁滯。
 **Keoi5 gung1 cang4 lau2 gam3zai6.*
 he afford Cl house GAMZAI

In some cases, although resultative verbs or verbal particles are omitted, the occurrence of *gam3zai6* is still acceptable. For example, *gam3zai6* can co-occur with the verbs that denote achievements, such as *jeng4* ‘win’ in (25) and *sei2* ‘die’ in (26). This is explicable in terms of the verbal semantics.

- (25) 佢贏咁滯。
Keoi5 jeng4 gam3zai6.
 he win GAMZAI
 ‘He almost won.’
- (26) 佢死咁滯。
Keoi5 sei2 gam3zai6.
 he die GAMZAI
 ‘He almost died.’

Another possibility that allows the occurrence of *gam3zai6* without any resultative verbs or verbal particles is where the predicates denote activities and can express the intention and the psychological situation of the subject. These sentences may present the coming about of a state and could be regarded as inchoatives. Consider the following examples.

- (27) 佢笑咁滯。
Keoi5 siu3 gam3zai6.
 he laugh GAMZAI
 ‘He almost laughed/wanted to laugh.’
- (28) 老闆鬧人咁滯。
Lou5baan2 naau6 jan4 gam3zai6.
 boss scold person GAMZAI
 ‘The boss almost scolded us.’

(27) is acceptable if the subject *keoi5* ‘he’ is understood as having almost laughed, or as having the intention to laugh. The interpretation of (28) is that the boss had the intention to scold people. The event of laughing and the event of scolding people could be regarded as the resultant state of a covert predicate that indicates the intentionality. The covert predicate can be realized as an irrealis verb. For example, (28) can be paraphrased with an overt irrealis verb *soeng2* ‘want’, as in (29).

- (29) 老闆想鬧人咁滯。
Lou5baan2 soeng2 naau6 jan4 gam3zai6.
 boss want scold person GAMZAI
 ‘The boss almost wanted to scold us.’

The ungrammaticality of the following examples shows that *gam3zai6* cannot co-occur with the predicates that denote states, including adjectival predicates like *lek1* ‘smart’ in (30), verbal predicates like *ci5* ‘resemble’ in (31), and nominal predicates like *sing1kei4luk6* ‘Saturday’ in (32).

- (30) *佢叻咁滯。
 **Keoi5 lek1 gam3zai6.*
 he smart GAMZAI
 ‘He is almost smart.’

- (31) *佢似阿爸咁滯。
**Keoi5 ci5 aa3baa4 gam3zai6.*
 he resemble father GAMZAI
 ‘He almost resembles his father.’

- (32) *今日星期六咁滯。
**Gam1jat6 sing1kei4luk6 gam3zai6.*
 today Saturday GAMZAI
 ‘?Today is almost Saturday.’

The telicity requirement of *gam3zai6* can be further illustrated by the contrast between (33) and (34). In Cantonese, *mou5* ‘not’ negates an action while *m4* ‘not’ negates a state or a habitual/generic property.

- (33) 佢冇 / *唔笑咁滯。
*Keoi5 mou5 / *m4 siu3 gam3zai6.*
 he not / not laugh GAMZAI
 ‘He almost did not laugh. / *He almost does not have a habit of laughing.’

- (34) 佢冇 / 唔笑乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 / m4 siu3 mat1zai6.
 he not / not laugh MATZAI
 ‘He did not laugh much at all. / He does not have a habit of laughing too much.’

However, I have noticed some exceptional cases. If a stative predicate can express the intention of the subject, such as *dong3* ‘consider’ in (35), or the nominal predicate has a numeral, such as *sei3sap6 sei3* ‘forty years old’ in (36), the occurrence of *gam3zai6* becomes acceptable.

- (35) 我直情當你兄弟咁滯。
Ngo5 zik6cing4 dong3 nei5 hing1dai6 gam3zai6.
 I simply consider you brother GAMZAI.
 ‘I almost consider you my brother/buddy.’
 (Zhang and Ni 1999: 112)

- (36) 佢四十歲咁滯。
Keoi5 sei3sap6 seoi3 gam3zai6.
 he forty year GAMZAI
 ‘He is almost forty years old.’

Given that the intentionality of the predicates plays a role, the acceptability of (35) can be attributed to the same factor that is in force in (28) and (29). To explain (36), we may assume that the existence of the numeral helps the nominal predicate to convey a meaning of change of state by virtue of its ordinal meaning. The hearer may interpret that the subject is getting older and has almost reached a presupposed endpoint, i.e., forty years old. Hence, the meaning of change of state emerges.¹¹

Regarding the syntactic distribution of *gam3zai6*, it can follow the object, if any, similar to *mat1zai6*. Unlike *mat1zai6*, *gam3zai6* does not impose any definiteness requirement on the nominal object. The following examples show that the nominal object can be either definite (= (37)) or indefinite (= (38)).

- (37) 黃教授寫完嗰三本書咁滯。
Wong4 gaau3sau6 se2-jyun4 go2 saam1-bun2 syu1 gam3zai6.
 Wong professor write-finish that three-Cl book GAMZAI
 ‘Professor Wong has almost finished writing those three books.’
- (38) 黃教授寫完三本書咁滯。
Wong4 gaau3sau6 se2-jyun4 saam1-bun2 syu1 gam3zai6.
 Wong professor write-finish three-Cl book GAMZAI
 ‘Professor Wong has almost finished writing three books.’

Another characteristic that differentiates *gam3zai6* from *mat1zai6* is that the former can co-occur with frequency phrases, such as (39) (cf. (17)).

- (39) 佢去咗三次咁滯。
Keoi5 heoi3-zo2 saam1-ci3 gam3zai6.
 he go-Perf three-time GAMZAI
 ‘He went there almost three times.’

The appearance of negative markers with *gam3zai6* is acceptable, but, unlike with *mat1zai6*, their appearance is not obligatory. *Gam3zai6* modifies the entire predicate, including the negation. As we can see from the English translation of (40), *gam3zai6* is used to modify the predicate *mou5 heoi3* ‘did not go’. The scopal relationship between *gam3zai6* and the negation is clear: *gam3zai6* has a wide scope reading.

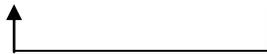
- (40) 佢冇去咁滯。
Keoi5 mou5 heoi3 gam3zai6.
 he not go GAMZAI
 ‘He almost did not go.’

Given that *gam3zai6* has wide scope over the negation, I assume that *gam3zai6* is projected above the negation and modifies the entire predicate, including the negation, if any, as informally sketched in (41). The adverb *gam3zai6* precedes the modified predicate underlyingly.

- (41) Subject [*gam3zai6* [(Negation) VP]]

To derive the right word order in Cantonese, I propose that movement is involved. What moves is the entire predicate that is modified by *gam3zai6*, as in (42). In other words, *gam3zai6* is a preverbal adverb underlyingly, which becomes a postverbal adverb on the surface.

- (42) Subject [[(Negation) VP] [*gam3zai6* _____]]



In sum, *gam3zai6* focuses on the process approaching the endpoint of the event. The predicates modified by *gam3zai6* are required to be telic denoting a change of state, which include those indicating resultatives and achievements. For the inchoatives, there is an acceptability boundary between not doing something and starting to do it. Similarly, in the sentences where the verb is apparently stative, the whole construction can be understood as approaching a new state of affairs.¹² Syntactically, *gam3zai6* is an adverb projected above the

predicate underlyingly and its occurrence in the sentence-final position is a result of movement of the entire predicate on the surface.

4. DISCONTINUOUS CONSTITUENCY OF CANTONESE ADVERBS

Recall that *mat1zai6* always co-occurs with a negative marker which is used to describe the inadequate frequency or degree conveyed by the predicate. In fact, a preverbal counterpart of *mat1zai6* can be found in Cantonese. For example, *dim2* in (43), which literally means ‘how’, has a similar function to *mat1zai6* in (8), as repeated in (44). To native speakers’ ears, (43) and (44) are almost identical in terms of their interpretation and can be regarded as paraphrases. Interestingly, *dim2* and *mat1zai6* can co-occur in the same sentence, as in (45), and both of them play the same role modifying the predicate *siu3* ‘laugh’.

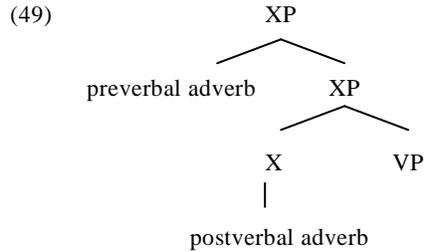
- (43) 佢冇點笑。
Keoi5 mou5 dim2 siu3.
 he not DIM laugh
 ‘He did not laugh much at all.’
- (44) 佢冇笑乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 siu3 mat1zai6.
 he not laugh MATZAI
 ‘He did not laugh much at all.’
- (45) 佢冇點笑乜滯。
Keoi5 mou5 dim2 siu3 mat1zai6.
 he not DIM laugh MATZAI
 ‘He did not laugh much at all.’

A preverbal counterpart of *gam3zai6* can also be found in Cantonese. In (46) *caal1m4do1* is a preverbal adverb and can be translated as ‘almost, nearly’ in English, on a par with the postverbal adverb *gam3zai6* in (2), as repeated in (47). Examples (46) and (47) could be regarded as paraphrases. (48) shows that it is perfectly acceptable if both *caal1m4do1* and *gam3zai6* co-occur with each other in the same sentence.

- (46) 佢差唔多做起篇文。
Keoi5 caa1m4do1 zou6-hei2 pin1 man2.
 he CAA'MDO do-finish Cl paper
 'He has almost finished the paper.'
- (47) 佢做起篇文咁滯。
Keoi5 zou6-hei2 pin1 man2 gam3zai6.
 he do-finish Cl paper GAMZAI
 'He has almost finished the paper.'
- (48) 佢差唔多做起篇文咁滯。
Keoi5 caa1m4do1 zou6-hei2 pin1 man2 gam3zai6.
 he CAA'MDO do-finish Cl paper GAMZAI
 'He has almost finished the paper.'

In terms of their interpretation, the postverbal adverbs *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6* and their preverbal counterparts are basically identical. To some extent, the simultaneous existence of these adverbs in sentences like (45) and (48) is somewhat 'redundant'. By virtue of their semantic 'redundancy', it is assumed that the preverbal and the postverbal adverbs, for example, *dim2 ... mat1zai6* in (45) and *caa1m4do1 ... gam3zai6* in (48), jointly modify the predicate and form a 'discontinuous' construction underlyingly (Tang 2006c).¹³

The preverbal adverb and the postverbal adverb in Cantonese form an adverbial phrase XP, in which the postverbal adverb is the head of the phrase and the preverbal adverb is an adjunct (Tang 2006c), having a structure like (49). The head X could be viewed as an open value which is in turn assigned range by the preverbal adverb, along the lines in Borer (2005). The modified predicate VP is the complement of the head X. In such a configuration, the adverbial, namely XP, is in fact a distinct functional projection that dominates the modified predicate hierarchically, along the lines of Cinque (1999).



The head of XP, namely the postverbal adverb, bears the edge feature, a feature that triggers Internal Merge (or movement), in the sense of Chomsky (2005, 2007). Suppose that the edge feature of X triggers Internal Merge of VP. After VP moves to the edge position of XP, i.e. the specifier of XP, the preverbal adverb is introduced by External Merge, the right word order ‘preverbal adverb + VP + X (postverbal adverb)’ is derived in Cantonese and the preverbal and postverbal adverbs become a ‘discontinuous’ constituent on the surface. The steps of the derivation are illustrated in (50).

- (50) a. [X VP]
 b. [_{XP} VP [X *t*_{VP}]]
 c. [_{XP} preverbal adverb [_{XP} VP [X *t*_{VP}]]]

If both the adjunct (i.e., the preverbal adverb) and the head X (i.e., the postverbal adverb) are overt, then sentences like (45) and (48) are derived. If the head is phonetically null, sentences like (43) and (46) are derived. If the head is overt but the adjunct is missing, (44) and (47) are derived.

Recall that *gam3zai6* has scope over the negation while *mat1zai6* has scope under the negation. By transitivity, *gam3zai6* should have wider scope than *mat1zai6* and consequently the former should c-command the latter. If *gam3zai6* and *mat1zai6* co-occur in the same sentence, the adverbial phrases headed by them, namely YP and XP, respectively, should be ‘stacked’ in the following hierarchical ordering in the clausal structure.¹⁴ The symbol ‘>’ in (51) is interpreted as ‘structurally higher than’.

- (51) YP (*caa1m4do1* ... *gam3zai6*) > XP (*dim2* ... *mat1zai6*)

In the syntactic derivation, XP (*dim2 ... mat1zai6*) should be introduced earlier than YP (*caalm4do1 ... gam1zai6*). The steps of the derivation are shown in (52) and (53). In (52), the head of XP, namely *mat1zai6*, first triggers Internal Merge of VP. The negation is merged with X after the preverbal adverb *dim2* is introduced.

- (52) a. [X VP]
 b. [_{XP} VP [X t_{VP}]]
 c. [_{XP} *dim2* [_{XP} VP [X t_{VP}]]]
 d. [_{XP} Neg [_{XP} *dim2* [_{XP} VP [X t_{VP}]]]]

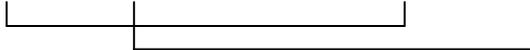
The next step is that the head of YP, namely *gam3zai6*, is merged with XP and then triggers Internal Merge of XP, as in (53a) and (53b). Finally, the adjunct *caalm4do1* is introduced, as in (53c), and the word order ‘*caalm4do1* + negation + *dim2* + VP + X (*mat1zai6*) + Y (*gam3zai6*)’ is derived.

- (53) a. [Y [_{XP} Neg [_{XP} *dim2* [_{XP} VP [X t_{VP}]]]]]]
 b. [_{YP} [_{XP} Neg [_{XP} *dim2* [_{XP} VP [X t_{VP}]]]] [Y t_{XP}]]
 c. [_{YP} *caalm4do1* [_{YP} [_{XP} Neg [_{XP} *dim2* [_{XP} VP [X t_{VP}]]]] [Y t_{XP}]]]]

In the linear order ‘*caalm4do1* + negation + *dim2* + VP + *mat1zai6* + *gam3zai6*’, the discontinuous construction *dim2 ... mat1zai6* is embedded under another discontinuous construction *caalm4do1 ... gam3zai6*. In other words, the preverbal adverb *caalm4do1* should always precede the preverbal adverb *dim2*. Meanwhile, the postverbal adverb *gam3zai6* should always follow the postverbal adverb *mat1zai6*. The grammatical example (54) supports the derivation above. If the discontinuous construction *caalm4do1 ... gam3zai6* is embedded under the discontinuous construction *dim2 ... mat1zai6*, as in (55), the judgment is deviant. In terms of linearization, the ‘nesting’ order displayed by these two discontinuous constructions, as exemplified in (56), should be a natural consequence of the derivations in (52) and (53).

- (54) 佢差唔多有點去乜滯咁滯。
Keoi5 caa1m4do1 mou5 dim2 heoi3 mat1zai6 gam3zai6.
 he CAA'MDO not DIM go MATZAI GAMZAI
 'He almost did not go much at all.'
- (55) *佢有點差唔多去咁滯乜滯。
 **Keoi5 mou5 dim2 caa1m4do1 heoi3 gam3zai6 mat1zai6.*
 he not DIM CAA'MDO go GAMZAI MATZAI
- (56) *caa1m4do1 dim2 predicate mat1zai6 gam3zai6*


The 'nesting' order in (56) explains straightforwardly why (57) is ungrammatical, as clearly indicated in (58).

- (57) *佢有點差唔多去乜滯咁滯。
 **Keoi5 mou5 dim2 caa1m4do1 heoi3 mat1zai6 gam3zai6.*
 he not DIM CAA'MDO go MATZAI GAMZAI
- (58) **dim2 caa1m4do1 predicate mat1zai6 gam3zai6*


Although either the preverbal adverb or the postverbal adverb could be optionally omitted in the discontinuous construction, the grammaticality judgments of the following examples suggest that the hierarchical relation is still obeyed.

- (59) 佢有去乜滯咁滯。
Keoi5 mou5 heoi3 mat1zai6 gam3zai6.
 he not go MATZAI GAMZAI
 'He almost did not go much at all.'
- (*gam3zai6* > *mat1zai6*)

- (60) *佢冇去咁滯乜滯。 (**mat1zai6* > *gam3zai6*)
 **Keoi5 mou5 heoi3 gam3zai6 mat1zai6*.
 he not go GAMZAI MATZAI
- (61) 佢差唔多冇點去。 (*caa1m4do1* > *dim2*)
Keoi5 caa1m4do1 mou5 dim2 heoi3.
 he CAA'MDO not DIM go
 'He almost did not go much at all.'
- (62) *佢冇點差唔多去。 (**dim2* > *caa1m4do1*)
 **Keoi5 mou5 dim2 caa1m4do1 heoi3*.
 he not DIM CAA'MDO go

What exactly are XP and YP in (53)? Considering the semantics of *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6*, I propose that XP and YP are phrases that are associated with events (also known as eventualities, situations, or *aktionsarten*) and tense/aspect, respectively. Recall that *mat1zai6*, i.e. the head of XP, is used to describe the inadequate frequency or degree denoted by the predicate, whose focus is mainly on the 'internal' properties of an event or a set of events. *Gam3zai6*, i.e. the head of YP, on the other hand, expresses the irrealis of the event, which involves some aspectual viewpoint and perhaps tense, such as the speech time and the reference time, mainly focusing on the 'external' properties of an event. Structurally, XP is closer to the predicate VP than YP. It is thus not surprising that X is always first merged with VP in syntax.

In addition to *mat1zai6*, X can also be realized as other postverbal adverbs associated with events, such as *sin1* 'first' in (3). The postverbal *sin1* 'first' and the preverbal *sin1* 'first' form a discontinuous construction, as in (63).

- (63) 佢先講先。
Keoi5 sin1 gong2 sin1.
 he first speak first
 'He spoke first.'

Example (64) shows that *sin1 ... sin1* can co-occur with *caa1m4do1 ... gam3zai6*. Interestingly, other word orders in (65) to (67) are all ungrammatical, which once again suggest that YP (e.g. *caa1m4do1 ... gam3zai6*) should be

higher than XP (e.g. *sin1* ... *sin1*) structurally.

- (64) 佢差唔多先講先咁滯。
Keoi5 caa1m4do1 sin1 gong2 sin1gam3zai6.
 he CAA'MDO first speak first GAMZAI
 'He almost spoke first.'
- (65) *佢先差唔多講先咁滯。
 **Keoi5 sin1 caa1m4do1 gong2 sin1gam3zai6.*
 he first CAA'MDO speak first GAMZAI
- (66) *佢差唔多先講咁滯先。
 **Keoi5 caa1m4do1 sin1 gong2 gam3zai6 sin1.*
 he CAA'MDO first speak GAMZAI first
- (67) *佢先差唔多講咁滯先。
 **Keoi5 sin1 caa1m4do1 gong2 gam3zai6 sin1.*
 he first CAA'MDO speak GAMZAI first

Y may either express the irrealis of the event, such as *gam3zai6*, or the realis of the event, such as *lei4* in (68). In the literature, *lei4* is usually treated as a sentence-final particle that indicates the recent past (Cheung 1972, Tang 1998, Lee and Yiu 1998). Preverbal adverbs like *zing3waa6* 'just now, a moment ago' in (68) and *lei4* may form a discontinuous construction.

- (68) 佢正話洗架車嚟。
Keoi5 zing3waa5 sai2 gaa3 ce1 lei4.
 he just wash Cl car LEI
 'He washed the car a moment ago.'

The discontinuous construction *zing3waa6* ... *lei4* can co-occur with *dim2* ... *mat1zai6*. The word order in (69) implies that the former should be higher than the latter structurally, conforming to our finding that YP (e.g. *zing3waa6* ... *lei4*) is higher than XP (e.g. *dim2* ... *mat1zai6*).

- (69) 佢正話有點洗架車乜滯嚟。
Keoi5 zing3waa5 mou5 dim2 sai2 gaa3 ce1 mat1zai6 lei4.
 he just not DIM wash CI car MATZAI LEI
 ‘He hardly washed the car at all a moment ago.’
- (70) *佢有點正話洗架車乜滯嚟。
 **Keoi5 mou5 dim2 zing3waa5 sai2 gaa3 ce1 mat1zai6 lei4.*
 he not DIM just wash CI car MATZAI LEI
- (71) *佢正話有點洗架車嚟乜滯。
 **Keoi5 zing3waa5 mou5 dim2 sai2 gaa3 ce1 lei4 mat1zai6.*
 he just not DIM wash CI car LEI MATZAI
- (72) *佢有點正話洗架車嚟乜滯。
 **Keoi5 mou5 dim2 zing3waa5 sai2 gaa3 ce1 lei4 mat1zai6.*
 he not DIM just wash CI car LEI MATZAI

In example (73), the preverbal adverb *waak6ze2* ‘perhaps, maybe, or’ and the mood particle *gaa3* are both used to express the speaker’s feeling of uncertainty about the information in the sentence (Matthews and Yip 1994) and can be analyzed as a discontinuous construction (Tang 2006c).¹⁵ The grammaticality of this example shows that *caa1m4do1 ... gam3zai6* can further be embedded under the discontinuous construction *waak6ze2 ... gaa3*. Example (74) is ungrammatical if *waak6ze2 ... gaa3* is embedded under *caa1m4do1 ... gam3zai6*.

- (73) 或者佢差唔多有點去乜滯咁滯掛。
Waak6ze2 keoi5 caa1m4do1 mou5 dim2 heoi3 mat1zai6 gam3zai6 gaa3.
 WAAKZE he CAA’MDO not DIM go MATZAI GAMZAI GWAA
 ‘Perhaps he almost did not go much at all.’
- (74) *佢差唔多或者有點去乜滯掛咁滯。
 **Keoi5 caa1m4do1 waak6ze2 mou5 dim2 heoi3 mat1zai6 gaa3 gam3zai6.*
 he CAA’MDO WAAKZE not DIM go MATZAI GWAA GAMZAI

I assume that there is a ZP in the Cantonese clausal structure, which is a phrase associated with mood and speech acts. The phrases headed by *gaa3* (Z) and *gam3zai6* (Y) should be in the hierarchical structure in (75), in which ZP is syntactically higher than YP, and its linear order ‘*waak6ze2 + caa1m4do1 + ... + Y*

(*gam3zai6*) + Z (*gwaa3*)' is derived by the steps in (76): the adverb *waak6ze2* is introduced after Z (*gwaa3*) has triggered Internal Merge of YP.

(75) ZP (*waak6ze2* ... *gwaa3*) > YP (*caa1m4do1* ... *gam3zai6*)

- (76) a. [Z YP]
 b. [_{ZP} YP [Z t_{YP}]]
 c. [_{ZP} *waak6ze2* [_{ZP} YP [Z t_{YP}]]]

In addition to *waak6ze2* ... *gwaa3*, other discontinuous constructions that express mood can form ZP, such as *gau3ging2* ... *sin1*. In Cantonese, *gau3ging2* is an adverb (lit.: 'to the end, after all') expressing some particular attitude, such as being impatient and annoyed, about the question and *sin1* is a mood particle that is used to reinforce such an impatient and annoyed attitude (Tang 2006b).¹⁶ Example (77) shows that the discontinuous construction *caa1m4do1* ... *gam3zai6* can be embedded under *gau3ging2* ... *sin1*. If the hierarchical relation between *caa1m4do1* ... *gam3zai6* and *gau3ging2* ... *sin1* is in reverse, the judgment is deviant, as shown in (78). The contrast between (77) and (78) further supports the claim that ZP is syntactically higher than YP.

- (77) 究竟邊個差唔多冇點去乜滯咁滯先?
Gau3ging2 bin1go3 caa1m4do1 mou5 dim2 heoi3 mat1zai6 gam3zai6 sin1?
 GAUGING who CAA'MDO not DIM go MATZAI GAMZAI SIN
 'Who the hell almost did not go much at all?'
 (78) *邊個差唔多究竟冇點去乜滯先咁滯?
 **Bin1go3 caa1m4do1 gau3ging2 mou5 dim2 heoi3 mat1zai6 sin1 gam3zai6?*
 who CAA'MDO GAUGING not DIM go MATZAI SIN GAMZAI

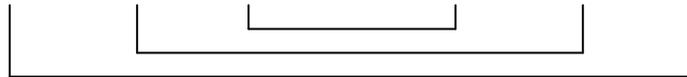
In terms of their interpretation, three types of discontinuous constructions in Cantonese are classified and their examples that have been discussed in this paper are summarized in (79). According to these classifications, the linear order of examples like (73) and (77) can now be simplified as in (80): the predicate follows the preverbal mood, tense/aspect, and event adverbs and precedes the postverbal event, tense/aspect, and mood adverbs/particles in a proper 'nesting'

order.

(79) Three types of discontinuous constructions in Cantonese

- a. Mood: *waak6ze2 ... gwaa3; gau3ging2 ... sin1*
- b. Tense/aspect: *caal1m4dol ... gam3zai6; zing3waa5 ... lei4*
- c. Events: *dim2 ... mat1zai6; sin1 ... sin1*

(80) mood tense/aspect events predicate events tense/aspect mood



If our discussion is on the right track, the ‘nesting’ order in Cantonese should be the output of the syntactic derivations based on the hierarchical structure in (81), in which ‘ZP’, ‘YP’, and ‘XP’ are phrases associated with mood, tense/aspect, and events, respectively.¹⁷

(81) ZP (mood) > YP (tense/aspect) > XP (events) > VP

Such a hierarchical structure is not an ad hoc assumption; instead, it conforms to principles of Universal Grammar, particularly the universal hierarchy of clausal functional projections, which has already been independently motivated. It is observed in the literature that the hierarchical order of the heads that encode the different types of functional notions of the clause like mood, tense/aspect, and events is rigidly fixed and invariant across languages (Rizzi 1997, Cinque 1999). Our discussion in this paper has demonstrated that linearization in Cantonese naturally follows from the universal syntactic hierarchy.

5. DIALECTAL VARIATION

Let us consider dialectal variation between Cantonese and Mandarin with regard to postverbal adverbs. Our previous example (54) could be translated as (82) in Mandarin. In (82) *jīhū* ‘almost’ and *zěnmē* ‘how’ are equivalent to the preverbal adverbs *caal1m4dol* and *dim2* in Cantonese, respectively. The ungrammaticality of (83) suggests that Mandarin basically obeys the same hierarchical relation of these adverbs (cf. (61) and (62) in Cantonese).

- (82) 他幾乎沒怎麼去。
Tā jīhū mēi zěnme qù.
 he almost not how go
 'He almost did not go much at all.'
- (83) *他沒怎麼幾乎去。
 **Tā mēi zěnme jīhū qù.*
 he not how almost go

Obviously, what Mandarin lacks is the postverbal adverbs and hence the discontinuous constituency of adverbs. In other words, the head of the adverbial phrase, i.e. X of XP in (49), is always null in Mandarin. If the analysis presented here is correct, a major parametric variation between Cantonese and Mandarin lies in the morphology of adverbs and the availability of the derivation of the discontinuous constructions.

There are some interesting implications of such a parametric analysis. First of all, the variation between Cantonese and Mandarin with respect to the discontinuous construction could be attributed to the analytic-synthetic parameter, assuming that discontinuity is a property of analyticity (Huang 2005). In Cantonese, both the adjunct and the head of the adverbial phrases in principle could be spelt out while only the adjunct of the adverbial phrases in Mandarin is overt. In this respect, Cantonese is more analytic than Mandarin in the adverbial domain.

Secondly, the analyticity of adverbs could be tied up with the availability of predicate movement in Cantonese. After comparing Cantonese with several Southeast Asian languages, Simpson (2001) argues that Cantonese is a language that allows predicate movement. I argue elsewhere that predicate movement is associated with the rich postverbal elements in Cantonese (Tang 2003a, b). The overt head of the Cantonese adverbial phrases, i.e. the postverbal adverb, could be regarded as the overt realization of the edge feature that triggers movement. Consequently, predicate movement in Cantonese can be signaled by morphologically 'rich' elements like postverbal adverbs. The syntactic difference between Cantonese and Mandarin with respect to predicate movement lies in the analyticity of adverbs. In this vein, movement is largely determined by

morphology. Such an analysis conforms to a fundamental assumption in the Minimalist Program advocated by Chomsky (1995) that variation must be determined by visible and detectable properties.

Thirdly, Cantonese predicate movement is likely to be caused by some ‘external’ factors. It has been suggested that predicate movement is a residue of language change in Cantonese (Simpson 2001); it could also be a result of language contact with Southeast Asian languages and minority languages historically (Li 1990, Peyraube 1997). Any or all of these factors could be the reasons why Cantonese is special in terms of its word order.¹⁸

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper examined various grammatical properties of two postverbal adverbs in Cantonese, viz *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6*, and the discontinuous constructions they constitute.

It was observed that *mat1zai6* is an adverbial that is used to modify the frequency or the degree denoted by the predicate. Underlyingly, *mat1zai6* is projected above the verb phrase and c-commanded by the negation. The verb phrase undergoes movement, deriving the postverbal word order of *mat1zai6* on the surface. On the other hand, *gam3zai6* focuses on the process approaching the endpoint of the event. The predicate modified by *gam3zai6* is required to be telic denoting a change of state. Syntactically, both *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6* are projected above the predicate underlyingly and their occurrence in the sentence-final position is a result of movement of the entire predicate on the surface.

It was further argued that syntactically the postverbal and preverbal adverbs form a discontinuous adverbial phrase in Cantonese, whose head, namely the postverbal adverb, triggers predicate movement step by step on the surface. Such adverbial phrases can be stacked and should be in a strict hierarchical order in the clausal structure.

If the analysis presented here is correct, a major parametric variation between Cantonese and Mandarin lies in the availability of the derivation of the discontinuous construction and the subsequent movement of the predicate. It is hoped that the findings of this paper may shed light on the syntax of Cantonese postverbal adverbs and the theory of discontinuous constructions.

NOTES

1. The early version of this paper was presented at the LSHK Workshop on Cantonese (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, April 28, 2001), Eleventh National Conference on Chinese Dialects (Xi'an Foreign Languages University, October 10-13, 2001), Tenth International Conference on Yue Dialects (Chinese University of Hong Kong, December 12-14, 2005), Third International Conference on Chinese Dialectal Grammar (Jinan University, December 2-3, 2006), and Wednesday Linguistics Seminar (Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, Chinese University of Hong Kong, March 7, 2007). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* for his or her very constructive criticisms and comments and for suggesting the present title of this paper. I would also like to thank Ben Au Yeung, Samuel Cheung, Yang Gu, Jim Huang, Thomas Lee, Danqing Liu, Yunming Shan, John Wakefield, Foong-ha Yap, and Qingwen Zhang for their useful discussion and suggestions. Special thanks go to John Wakefield for proofreading which improved the English translations of the Cantonese examples a lot. All of the errors are of course my own. This work has been supported in part by funding entitled 'Studies on the Syntactic Analyticity of Chinese Clauses' (A-PA3S) from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and 'Formal Syntax Theory and a Study of Some Essential Chinese Syntactic Issues' (05JJD740184) from the Key Project Schema of the Advanced Research Bases in Humanities and Social Sciences, Ministry of Education, P. R. China.
2. Hong Kong Cantonese is a Yue dialect spoken in Hong Kong. The Romanization system for Cantonese used in this paper is the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong Cantonese Romanization Scheme known as *Jyutping*. Tones are represented as follows: 1: high level, 2: high rising, 3: mid level, 4: low falling, 5: low rising, and 6: low level. The following abbreviations are used in giving glosses for Cantonese examples: Cl: classifier, and Perf: perfective aspect marker.
3. See Tang (2006a) for a literature review of the study of *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6*.
4. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this paper who pointed out to me the approximation analysis of *mat1zai6*.
5. (i) is documented in Yuan et al (1960: 226). However, it is unacceptable to the ears of native speakers of Hong Kong Cantonese. As a matter of fact, (i) was excluded

from the second edition of Yuan et al (2001).

(i) 佢食飽乜滯。

Keoi5 sik6-baau2 mat1zai6

he eat-full MATZAI

6. As pointed out to me by John Wakefield (personal communication), the requirement of a negated predicate also holds true of English *at all*, as in (i). There seem to be some grammatical similarities between Cantonese *mat1zai6* and English *at all*.

(i) He is *(not) too happy at all.

7. I speculate that the definiteness requirement of *mat1zai6* could be treated on a par with the definiteness of partitives as an interpretation of (14) is somewhat similar to 'He did not read many (sub-parts) of the three books'. The precise analysis, however, remains open for future research.

8. Whether the negative marker is adjoined to the verb phrase or heads its own projection, namely 'NegP', above the verb phrase is irrelevant in the present discussion and beyond the scope of this paper. A refined syntactic analysis of *mat1zai6* will be given later in this paper.

9. See Cinque (1999) for an extensive discussion of predicate raising and its consequences on the analysis of postverbal adverbial phrases in English and Italian. A refined analysis of the syntactic derivation of Cantonese postverbal adverbs will be presented below.

10. See Zhang (2005) for a detailed discussion of the telicity requirement of *gam3zai6*.

11. The analysis of nominal predicates presented in this paper is inspired by Xing's (1984) observations on so-called 'NP *le*' sentences in Mandarin Chinese.

12. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who summarized the grammatical properties of *gam3zai6*.

13 The theory of discontinuous constructions in Cantonese was originally inspired by the study of the discontinuity of Chinese adpositions by Liu (2003). Law (1990) has a similar analysis and claims that Cantonese preverbal adverb *zung6* 'still' and postverbal adverb *tim1* 'even, also' form a discontinuous construction.

14. The negation Neg is tentatively put under YP as an adjunct in (52). See also footnote 8.

15. The function of the Cantonese particle *gwaa3* is similar to that of *I guess* in American English (Matthews and Yip 1994: 353). Interestingly, it is likely that *gwaa3* was historically derived from merging the verb *gwu2* ‘guess’ + the mood particle *aa3*.
16. The function of Cantonese *gau3ging2* is similar to that of *the hell* in *wh-the-hell* expressions in English and *dàodī* in Mandarin. See Huang and Ochi (2004) for a comparative study of English *wh-the-hell* and Mandarin *dàodī*.
17. ‘Z’, ‘Y, and ‘X’ are simply mnemonic expressions and I do not commit myself to any particular proposal regarding the syntactic label of these functional heads in Cantonese.
18. Unfortunately, I am unable to come to any conclusions here regarding the diachronic development of *mat1zai6* and *gam3zai6* as well as predicate raising in Cantonese due to insufficient evidence and will leave it for future research.

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粵語兩個表示近似意義副詞的句法分析：
由“滯”形成的框式結構

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提要

本文探討粵語兩個表示近似意義的後置副詞“乜滯”和“咁滯”的語法特點，以及它們所組成的框式結構的句法分析。本文認為“乜滯”用來修飾有否定詞的謂語所表示的動作次數和程度，而“咁滯”強調邁向事件自然終結點的過程。這兩個詞原本都是位於動詞短語之上的中心語，不過由於謂語逐步移位的關係，出現在句末的位置。後置副詞和前置副詞組成框式副詞短語，這種短語在句子裏可以重疊，並且高低有序。本文的發現對粵語後置副詞的句法研究和框式結構的理論應該有一定的參考價值。

關鍵詞

粵語，句法學，副詞，框式結構，分析性