

Abstract of thesis entitled

**Processing factors in language comprehension and production:  
the case of Cantonese dative constructions**

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Chinese linguistics favours pragmatic factors to explain alternatives to the canonical SVO order, such as topicalization and the BA-construction. However, the typological configuration of Cantonese, SVO with prenominal relative clauses (RCs), is predicted to cause processing difficulty for its speakers, especially for the dative construction: [V Theme(T) Recipient(R)] when the theme is modified by a relative clause. A previous study by Cheung (2004, 2005) reported that, as opposed to heavy NP shift (HNPS) in English, Cantonese speakers more frequently use alternative constructions such as the double-*bei2* construction [*bei2* T *bei2* R] or the *zoeng1*-construction [*zoeng1* T *bei2* R] (which is equivalent to the Mandarin BA-construction) while the theme NP is more complex.

This study employs a dual-task paradigm to compare the comprehension and production of the *zoeng1*-construction and the canonical double-object dative. The *zoeng1*-construction is found to be read faster in a masked self-paced reading task, and is imitated more accurately than the canonical construction in the elicited imitation task. To account for such effects, it is suggested that (i) the lexical domain for the verb *bei2* is shorter in the *zoeng1*-construction than the canonical construction, consistent with the principle Minimize Domains (Hawkins 2004), and (ii) the theta roles and thus the argument structure can be assigned early in the *zoeng1*-construction, consistent with the principle Maximize Online Processing (Hawkins 2004).

