

Abstract of thesis entitled

**A SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF
VERBAL PARTICLES IN CANTONESE**

submitted by

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for the degree of Master of Philosophy
at the University of Hong Kong
in June 2004

The present study is an attempt to develop a systematic and unified way of accounting for the range of meanings exhibited by verbal particles in Cantonese and to develop a more satisfactory way of grouping them into categories. It aims at examining and describing the particles' semantic and pragmatic properties. Studies in the past have tended not to treat Cantonese verbal particles as a system. In this thesis, an attempt is made to fill this gap. The observations made in this study are based primarily on a close examination of a Cantonese corpus consisting of about 8 hours of genuine, colloquial, unscripted and spontaneous speech.

The term "verbal particle" in this study is defined as a versatile, grammatical bound form occurring immediately after verbs. Altogether 16 particles are identified: *gan*³⁵ "緊", *zyu*²² "住", *hoi*⁵⁵ "開", *zo*³⁵ "咗", *hei*³⁵ "起", *gwo*³³ "過", *haa*²³ "吓", *maai*²¹ "埋", *saai*³³ "晒", *gam*³⁵ "減", *wan*²¹ "勻", *sei*³⁵ "死", *can*⁵⁵ "親", *dak*⁵⁵ "得", *faan*⁵⁵ "翻" and *ding*²² "定". It is proposed that they can be classified into three semantic categories namely aspect, quantification and modality.

The seven verbal particles *gan*³⁵ "緊", *zyu*²² "住", *hoi*⁵⁵ "開", *zo*³⁵ "咗", *hei*³⁵ "起", *gwo*³³ "過" and *haa*²³ "吓" are termed aspectual particles. By using some syntactic and semantic tests, it is found that *zo*³⁵ "咗", *hei*³⁵ "起", *gwo*³³ "過" and *haa*²³ "吓" can be further classified as perfective particles while *gan*³⁵ "緊", *zyu*²² "住" and *hoi*⁵⁵ "開"



the imperfective particles.

The four particles *maat*²¹ “埋”, *saai*³³ “晒”, *wan*²¹ “勻” and *gam*³⁵ “減” are considered as quantificational particles. They put emphasis on different parts of the quantificational process. *Maai*²¹ “埋” emphasizes the quantification of the last of a series of items in a domain while *saai*³³ “晒” puts the emphasis on the quantification of “all” items in a domain. On the other hand, *wan*²¹ “勻” includes every single item being quantified while *gam*³⁵ “減” emphasizes that only “part” of what is being quantified is at issue.

The remaining five particles *sei*³⁵ “死”, *can*⁵⁵ “親”, *dak*⁵⁵ “得”, *faan*⁵⁵ “翻” and *ding*²² “定” are found to be closely linked to the expression of modality in Cantonese and therefore are termed modal particles. They allow speakers to express their attitudes towards certain situations and to reflect their thoughts in their mental world.

