

Abstract of thesis entitled

ASPECTS OF THE CANTONESE VERB PHRASE: ORDER AND RANK

submitted by

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This thesis investigates aspects of the Cantonese Verb Phrase (VP), focusing on some word order phenomena related to the Cantonese VP. Analyses are conducted within the OT-LFG framework, in which the word order phenomena are accounted for in terms of constraint ranking and interaction.

It has been widely accepted that the most basic VP, for those languages that do indeed have a VP, consists of the head verb and, when required, its object noun phrase. The ordering of these two building blocks varies, depending on the head directionality of the language. For Cantonese, a head-first language, the verb is immediately followed by its object. There are, however, at least two situations in which this order can be upset.

The first is the possible ‘disruption’ of the adjacency of the verb and its object by frequency expressions. The interesting part is that it is not all objects that can be separated from the verb. Whether an object is allowed to do so depends on its markedness. An unmarked object is free to occur in a position that is immediately after the verb or after both the verb and the frequency expression, while a marked object has no alternative but to appear immediately after the verb. It is suggested that such forced adjacency of marked objects to the verb is a type of *syntactic object-marking*. Object-marking is not achieved by morphological means like many



other languages (Aissen 2003), but by the syntactic means of requiring the object to occupy the most unmarked position for objects, i.e. one that is adjacent to the verb.

The second situation in which the default state of affairs in a VP can be disturbed involves the individual verbs in serial verb constructions (SVCs). While it is true that the verbs in an SVC have degrees of internal cohesion among them both syntactically and semantically, there exist constructions in the language in which one of the verb(s) (phrases) can be separated from the rest and put at the beginning of a clause. One of the motivations, as it has been proposed for Cantonese, is to put emphasis on that verb (phrase). Other considerations constraining such an ordering are also presented.

Knowledge of the structure of the Cantonese Verb Phrase is essential to research on Cantonese syntax. It is hoped that this study contributes to the understanding of the structure of Cantonese.

(392 words)

