

Abstract of thesis entitled

THE SUBJECT FUNCTION IN CANTONESE

submitted by

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This dissertation is a study of the syntax of the grammatical function, *Subject*, in Cantonese, a variety of Chinese, within the theoretical framework of Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG) (Bresnan and Kaplan 1982, Bresnan 2001).

Subject is a prominent notion in almost all theories of grammar, and yet there is no consistent definition of *Subject* cross-linguistically. Based on previous literature on Chinese, it is shown that there remain controversies over the designation of *Subject* in the language. It is thus proposed that a set of collective properties is needed to identify *Subject* in Chinese. The proposals are made based on evidence from Cantonese data.

In the current study, the collective criteria for identifying *Subject* in Cantonese are based on Keenan (1976)'s Subject Properties List (SPL) which includes coding, behavior and control, and semantic properties. It is found that not all the 30 properties proposed by Keenan (1976) can be attested in Cantonese. Indeed, only two syntactic properties, reflexivization and possessor relativization, are salient for characterizing



Subject. It is concluded that *Subject* often takes an unmarked preverbal position, and should be an argument function of its predicate. These two unique subject properties are also used to examine the subjecthood of an NP in controversial constructions.

This study also explores lexical mapping between *Subject* and its argument role in certain syntactic structures in Cantonese based on the Lexical Mapping Theory (LMT) within LFG. The limitations concerning the LMT model are addressed by three morphological rules for passivization and locative inversions in Cantonese.

This work further demonstrates that Cantonese is a kind of null subject language. The null subject phenomenon is indeed very productive in the language. Three types of null subjects, including non-referential null subject, discourse-referential null subject and embedded null subject are introduced. The null subjects are retrievable by the LFG approach augmented by Information Structure (Lambrecht 1994). The lexical mapping between null subjects and argument roles can also be accounted for.

Finally, this study has proposed a detailed analysis of *Subject* in Cantonese in the hope that it will offer new insights for the theoretical framework of LFG from the perspective of Cantonese linguistics.

(352 words)

