Cantonese Syntax

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LING-L303
Intro. to Linguistic Analysis
Overview

- Cantonese
- Phrase structure rules
- Aspect
- Subject-verb agreement
Cantonese
- A dialect of Yue Chinese
- Spoken in southern China
- Syntactic structure similar to Mandarin Chinese
Basic constituent order

- **Subject**  Verb  Object

  貓  食  魚
  maaau  sik  jyu

  Cats  eat  fish.

\[ S \rightarrow NP \ VP \]
\[ VP \rightarrow V.\text{trans} \ NP \]

**Same order** in English and Cantonese (in general)
Noun phrase

- NP → (Det Numeral **Classifier**) (Adj) N

1. 一 隻 馬騮
   one **CL** monkey
   “a monkey”

2. 嘢 枝 綠色嘅 筆
   this **CL** green pencil
   “this pencil”

3. 嘢 三 間 大屋
   that three **CL** big house
   “those three big houses”

- **Classifier** has to **agree** with NP
- Number agreement is **NOT** necessary
Pronouns

**Subject**

我/你/佢
ngo/nei/keoi
主修
zyusau
major in
語言學。
jyujinhok
linguistics.

**Object**

隻
zek
CL
花栗鼠
faaleotsyu
chipmunk
咬
aau
bite
我/你/佢。
ngo/nei/keoi
me/you/him/her.
Pronoun-dropping

A: (你) 見 咁 佢 未 ？

nei gin zo keoi mei
you see PFV him/her yet

“Have you seen him yet?”

B: (我) 見 咁 (佢)。

ngo gin zo keoi
I see PFV him/her

“I have seen him.”

Pronouns dropped if they can be inferred.
Prepositional phrase

- PP → P NP

係屋企
hai ukkei
at home

係戲院
hai heijyun
in theater

“at home”
“in the theater”
Possessive phrase

- PossP → {Pro, NP} CL NP

我 个 袋  
go CL bag

教授 本书
gaausau bun syu
professor

“my bag”

“the professor’s book”
Verb phrases

- VP.transitive → V.transitive NP

  飲  茶
  jum  caa
drink  tea

- VP.intransitive → V.intransitive (PP)

  跑  向  出口
  paau  hoeng  ceothau
  run  toward  exit
Verb phrases

- Some PPs have to appear before the V

Need to establish different PP categories.
Verb phrases

- VP.stative → V.stative Adj
  
  覺得  
  gokdak  feel  
  gui  tired

- VP.attributive → V.attributive NP Adj
  
  話  佢  顛  
  waa  keoi  din  call  him/her  loony
Verb phrases

- VP.clausal → V.clausal S

- In English, it is possible to say “guess that…”

- No complementizer in Cantonese
Aspect

- No tense markings, but **aspectual** affixes:

1. 隻 貓 暈.咗。
   - zek maau wan.zo
   - CL cat faint.PFV
   - “The cat fainted.”

2. 我 學.過 德文。
   - ngo hok.gwo dakman
   - I study.EXP German.
   - “I have studied German before.”

3. 佢 講.緊 電話。
   - keoi gong.gan dinwaa
   - (S)he talk.PROG telephone
   - “(S)he is talking on the phone.”
Subject-verb agreement

- Cantonese does not distinguish singular and plural. Hence, no subject-verb agreement.

我

我係

係

係

係

學生

am

a student

我哋

我哋係

係

係

係

學生

students