

What the distribution of *sin* 'first' can tell us about the question why Cantonese has more verbal and sentence particles than Mandarin
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Date: April 23, 2010 (Friday)
Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm
Venue: LT2, Lady Shaw Building,
Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

It has been observed that Cantonese has more verbal particles and more sentence final particles than Mandarin. It has also been observed that Cantonese has one postverbal adverbial, *sin* 'first' in a way in which Mandarin has none. In this talk I explore the relation between these two observations. I first investigate the question whether the atypical postverbal occurrence of the adverbial *sin* in Cantonese is due to language contact, as has been suggested. After teasing apart several different *sins*, which differ, in different degrees, from one another in semantics, pronunciation and distribution, and after confirming that postverbal *sin* is indeed an adverbial, we look at adverb placement in the Tai language Zhuang, observing that in that language (as is the case with other Tai languages) many more adverbials are found in postverbal position than is the case in Sinitic. We may conclude that the positioning of *sin* behind the verb is indeed due to language contact. The question that comes up then, however, is why *sin* is the only postverbal adverbial in Cantonese. The speculative answer is that there were more, but that they have been reanalysed into verbal and sentence final particles, which may explain why Cantonese has many more such particles than Mandarin.

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