Clausal adverbs and clausal structure in Cantonese

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Cinque (1999) presents compelling evidence for the Universal Base Hypothesis, the bold and far-reaching claim that at the clausal level all languages have the same fundamental hierarchical structure; and that every projection in this hierarchy is necessarily associated with a particular semantic interpretation. In this paper we test Cinque's hypothesis by examining adverbial distribution in Cantonese Chinese. We argue that Cantonese startlingly confirms Cinque's hypothesis. We also examine the properties of DP-related projections, such as Topic, Focus and other potential positions for subjects and other phrases, and argue that Topic-prominent languages such as Cantonese lack a single structural projection in which subjects will always be found.

Key words: Modern Chinese – Cantonese : syntax – clausal adverbs – Universal Base Hypothesis.

Cinque (1999) donne une preuve convaincante en faveur de l'Universal Base Hypothesis, à savoir que, au niveau de la proposition, toutes les langues ont la même structure hiérarchique fondamentale, et que chaque projection dans cette hiérarchie est nécessairement associée avec une interprétation sémantique particulière. Nous vérifions ici cette hypothèse en examinant la distribution des adverbes en cantonais et soutenons que le cantonais vient confirmer cette hypothèse. Nous examinons également les propriétés des projections liées au DP, tels que le topique, le focus, ainsi que les positions pouvant être occupées par le sujet. Nous avançons que les langues à topique proéminent telles que le cantonais manquent d'une projection unique dans laquelle se trouverait toujours le sujet.


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INTRODUCTION

It has long been observed that clausal adverbs fall into a number of distinct semantic classes (e.g., Jackendoff's (1972) classification of adverbs into temporal, speaker-oriented, subject-oriented, etc.). Since Jackendoff, it has generally been accepted that these classes correlate with different possibilities for adverbial orderings in the sentence. The semantics of adverbs and their related (clausal, temporal, modal, etc.) interpretations have been extensively studied, while there is also abundant literature on the adverbs' syntactic and distributional properties in different languages (Lewis (1975), Hoye (1997), Smith (1991), Ernst (1997), (1998), Rochette (1990), Travis (1988), among others). However, until recently, two fundamental issues have not been systematically investigated from a crosslinguistic perspective. The first issue concerns the formal nature of the link between the interpretation of the clausal adverbials and the semantics of their morphological counterparts (for example, tense, modal and aspectual elements). The second issue deals with the extent to which the semantic interpretation and relative ordering of the different types of adverbs is genuinely universal across languages.

In *Adverbs and Functional Heads*, Cinque (1999) addresses both these issues by providing a solid cross-linguistic foundation for two powerful linked claims. The first is based on the longstanding observation that the semantic notions of tense, modality, aspect, etc. can be morphologically and syntactically expressed in a number of different ways within and across languages. For example, in English the notion of *PAST TENSE* can be expressed as a bound affix on the verb (the *-ed* suffix in *walked*), as an independent tense element (auxiliary form *did*), or as an adverbial form (*once*). Cinque argues on the basis of extensive comparative evidence that the different realisations of a single clausal notion such as *PAST TENSE* are formally linked in the geometry of the syntactic tree. Each semantic notion is projected into the clause as a unique functional projection. Thus, *PAST TENSE*