

THE ENCODING OF AFFECTEDNESS IN CANTONESE POST-VERBAL PARTICLES: THE CASE OF *CAN*

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Cantonese post-verbal particles

Cantonese has a very rich inventory of post-verbal particles: verb-x. Matthews and Yip (2011) classify them as:

- Aspectual markers: progressive, perfective, etc. (e.g. *zo*)
- Directional particles: up, down, away, etc. (e.g. *dai*)
- Resultative particles: full, finish, etc. (e.g. *bao*)
- Quantifying particles: all, along, etc. (e.g. *sai*)

- Adversative/habitual particle: *can*

Can has two different senses. It can mean (i) “being adversely affected”, as in (1) or (ii) “whenever”, as in (2).

(1) ngo zong-can zek maau aa
 1SG bump.into-CAN CL cat SFP
 “I bumped into the cat and as a result the cat was negatively
 affected).”

(2) keoi coeng-can go dou ham ga
 3SG sing-CAN song always cry SFP
 “S/He_i cries whenever s/he_i sings.”

Note that in (1), if the cat was killed, it would not be an accurate statement. If the cat was bruised, (1) would give a correct depiction of the situation. In brief, the “end-point” of the effect of the action is not specific, but it cannot be too severe.

Compatibility with aspectual particles

Even though *can* and aspectual particles both appear after the verb, they are NOT in complementary distribution:

(3) lei jau mou dit-can-gwo aa?
 2SG have not.have fall-CAN-EXP SFP
 “Have you fallen and got hurt before?”

(4) keoi dit-can-zo zek sau aa
 3SG fall-CAN-PERF CL hand SFP
 “S/He_i fell and hurt his/her_i arm.”

A verb can be followed by both *can* and an aspectual particle, though the ordering must be *can-ASP* but not **ASP-can*.

Adversative reading

- (5) ngo zong-**can** zek maau aa
 1SG bump.into-**CAN** CL cat SFP
 “I bumped into the cat (and as a result the cat was negatively affected).”

The effect has to be adversative.

- (6) *ngo zan-can keoi aa
 1SG praise-CAN 3SG SFP
 Intended reading: “I praised her/him and as a result s/he was positively affected to a small degree.”

Use with idioms

- *cat-haai* “polish shoe” = to flatter
- *cat-x-haai* “polish x’s shoe” = to flatter x

(7) keoi_A cat-can keoi_B haai
 3SG polish-CAN 3SG shoe

(7) can only be used if B is actually annoyed by the flattering.

Sentience

- (8) ngo tek-can zek mau/ #bui aa
 1SG kick-CAN CL cat/ cup SFP
 “I kicked the cat and it is adversely affected.”
 # “I kicked the cup and it is adversely affected.”

The sentient entity does not have to be the surface object:

- (9) keoi puk-can (unaccusative)
 3SG trip-CAN
 “S/He tripped and s/he adversely affected.”

Body-parts

- (10) keoi zek sau dit-can
 3SG CL hand fall-CAN
 “He fell and hurt his arm.”
- (11) keoi dit-can zek sau
 3SG fall-CAN CL hand
 “He fell and hurt his arm.”
- (12) #keoi zek biu dit-can
 3SG CL watch fall-CAN
- (13) ngo go tau kokdak hou wan
 1SG CL head feel very dizzy
 “My head feels very dizzy.”

Gu and Yip (2004) (following Perlmutter 1978, Burzio 1986):
 unaccusative verb-CAN possessor CL N

Either the whole underlying object will move up to the subject position, or the possessor would move up. That gives us two possibilities:

- (i) possessor CL N verb
- (ii) possessor verb CL N

This predicts that both possibilities are present at all times, which is actually not the case:

(14) ngo dit-CAN sau (1SG fall-CAN hand)

(15) *ngo sau dit-CAN (1SG hand dit-CAN)

Differences from other resultative particles

- Gu and Yip (2004) treats verb-*can* as a resultative predicate. Wyngaerd (2001) claims that resultative predicates are subject to a boundedness requirement: they are telic. Gu and Yip (2004) claims that such boundedness, however, can be non-specific. It cannot be a predicate on its own.

(16a) keoi guk-**wan**-zo
 3SG suffocate-faint-PERF
 “S/He suffocated and fainted.”

(16b) keoi **wan**-zo
 3SG faint-PERF
 “S/He fainted.”

(17a) keoi guk-**can**
 3SG suffocate-CAN
 “S/He suffocated and was adversely affected.”

(17b) *keoi **can**

Physical contact not required

- (18) lei haak-can keoi laa
 2SG frighten-CAN 3SG SFP
 “You frighten him/her (and as a result she is scared).”
- (19) lei faan-can keoi laa
 2SG annoy-CAN 3SG SFP
 “You annoy him/her (and as a result she is annoyed).”

Incompatibility with unergatives

Gu and Yip (2004) observes that *can* is not compatible with unergatives:

- (20) * zek maau tiu-can-zo aa
 CL cat jump-CAN-PERF SFP
 “The cat jumped and thus it was adversely affected.”

They claim that unergatives like *tiu* “jumping” cannot be combined with *can* as it is not specific. When the resultative particle provides a specific end-point, it is compatible with unergatives verbs.

- (21) zek maau tiu-wan-zo aa
 CL cat jump-faint-PERF SFP
 “The cat jumped so much that it fainted.”

Compatibility with unaccusatives

(22) keoi puk-can (unaccusative)

3SG trip-CAN

“S/He tripped and it is adversely affected to a small degree.”

Can requires an underlying sentient object? This would also explain why it is incompatible with unergatives.

- *Can* is compatible with transitive verbs, unaccusative verbs, but not unergative verbs.

The lack of control of the agent

(23) ngo jau-mou zong-can lei aa?
 1SG have-not.have bump.into-CAN QP
 “Did I bump into you and hurt you?”

(24) # ngo jau-mou zong lei aa?
 1SG have-not.have bump.into 2SG QP
 Intended reading: “Did I bump into you (on purpose)?”

- The agent has control over bumping into someone, but s/he has no control over whether there is an adversative effect on the sentient object.

With “intentionally”

(25) ?? ngo dakdang haak-can keoi gaa
 1SG intentionally frighten-CAN 3SG SFP

ngo dakdang haak keoi gaa
 1SG intentionally frighten 3SG SFP

“I frightened him/her intentionally.”

- In general, verb + *can* does not sound too good when it appears with *dakdang* “intentionally”.

Incompatibility with “right now”

- Gu and Yip (2004) observe that “verb-*can*” complexes are not compatible with *haidou* “right now”:

* keoi haidou haak-can go bibi
 3SG right now frighten-CAN CL baby

Intended reading: “S/He is frightening the baby right now.”

It is also not compatible with the progressive aspectual particle *gan*:

(26) * keoi haidou haak-can-gan go bibi
 3SG right now frighten-CAN-PROG CL baby

Without *can*, there is no problem:

(27) keoi haidou haak-gan go bibi
 3SG right now frighten-PROG CL baby

(28) The boy is melting the ice. (accomplishment)

- Gu and Yip (2004) claim that it is possible to focus on the “activity” part of an accomplishment, (28). The same cannot be done to verb-*can*. Verb-*can* complexes behave like achievements.
- As predicted, they are not compatible with adverbs like *jat-bou-jat-bou* “step-by-step”

dou vs. can

(29) ngo dit-dou, daanhai mou dit-can
 1SG fall-DOU, but not.have fall-CAN
 “I fell, but I didn’t hurt myself.”

- *Dou* is a resultative post-verbal particle (Matthews and Yip 2011).
- In (29), *dit-dou* means the falling has been achieved, but *dit-can* does not just mean the action has been accomplished, it also means that the sentient object in the sentence is mildly hurt by the action.
- *V-can* presupposes *V-dou*

- *Dou* and *can* select different verbs (they overlap but not completely).
- *Dou* is not compatible with verbs like *gik* “agitate”. *Can* is.
- *Dou* is compatible with *gin* “see”, *teng* “listen”, etc. *Can* is not.
- *Dou* is compatible with non-sentient objects (e.g. cup).

Dou means accomplishing the action.

Can means accomplishing the action + the action having an effect on the “sentient” object.

→ Their semantic differences make them select different verbs.

What kind of verbs does *can* select?

Beavers' (2011) 4 degrees of affectedness:

- (i) The change is **quantized** if x reaches a specific, unique result state (e.g. kill x).
- (ii) The change is **non-quantized** if a result is entailed to exist, but is not uniquely specified. (cut x)
- (iii) A **potential for change** is a non-quantized change at some possible world. (hit x)
- (iv) **Unspecified for a change** is where no transition is necessarily possible (touch x)

Degree of affectedness

Event: *bump into a cat*

d_0 ----- $d_{infinite}$

Scale: how negatively affected is the “experiencer”

$d_0 < d_{can}$

As long as the degree is more than d_0 , *can* can be licensed.

- Why is it the case that when *can* is used, the implicature is that the degree of affectedness is small?

It could be an implicature. As when the degree is higher, speakers would choose another resultative particle such as *sei* “dead”.

- Different degree of affectedness: verb-*dou*, verb-*can*, verb-*wan* (faint), verb-*sei* (die),

Types of change

Beavers' (2011) proposes the following types of change:

- (a) *x* changes in some observable property (*clean/paint/delouse/fix/break x*)
- (b) *x* transforms into something else (*turn/carve/change/transform x into y*)
- (c) *x* moves and stays at some location (*move/push/angle/roll x into y*)
- (d) *x* is physically impinged (*hit/kick/punch/rub/slap/wipe/scrub/sweep x*)
- (e) *x* goes out of existence (*delete/eat/consume/reduce/devour x*)
- (f) *x* comes into existence (*build/design/construct/create x*)

➤ Beavers' (2011) types of change would not work too well as *can* is also used for effect that is psychological.

The whenever *can*

- (29) ngo sik-can minbao...
 1SG eat-CAN bread
 “Whenever I eat bread...”

d_0 ----- $d_{infinite}$

Scale: cumulation of instances of the event denoted the clause

$d_0 < d_{can}$

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