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. saai)
- 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/He₁ cries whenever s/he₁ 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) \( \text{keoi}_A \text{ cat-can } \text{keoi}_B \text{ haai} \)
\[3SG \text{ polish-CAN } 3SG \text{ shoe}\]

(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.”

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) treat verb-\textit{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) \begin{tabular}{llll}
keoi & guk-wan-zo & 3SG & suffocate-faint-PERF \end{tabular} (16b) \begin{tabular}{llll}
keoi & wan-zo & 3SG & faint-PERF \end{tabular}

\text{“S/He suffocated and fainted.”} \hspace{1cm} \text{“S/He fainted.”}

(17a) \begin{tabular}{llll}
keoi & guk-can & 3SG & suffocate-CAN \end{tabular}

\text{“S/He suffocated and was adversely affected.”}

(17b) *\begin{tabular}{llll}
keoi & can & 3SG & suffocate-PERF \end{tabular}
Physicial 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*

\[ d_0 \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow d_{\text{infinite}} \]

Scale: how negatively affected is the “experiencer”

\[ d_0 < d_{\text{can}} \]

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…

\[d_0 \rightarrow d_{\text{infinite}}\]

Scale: cumulation of instances of the event denoted the clause

\[d_0 < d_{can}\]
References


