

## FOCUS AND *DAK* IN CANTONESE\*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines various properties of the focus operator *dak* in Cantonese. The focus operator *dak* can occur in two positions in Cantonese: a postverbal position and a preverbal position. In this article, it is argued that these two focus *dak*'s are not the same: postverbal *dak* is a verbal suffix whereas preverbal *dak* is a verb. It is suggested that the preverbal *dak* construction can be treated on a par with the cleft construction. In addition, the relation between *dak* and the focus sentence final particle *zaa*, the relation between *dak* and negation, and the conditions of occurrence of several postverbal *dak*'s in Cantonese will be discussed.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Literally, *dak* (得) means 'to acquire, to have, to get' in Cantonese. For example, *dak* in (1) is used as a verb.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) 啲難民得咗一個怪病。  
Di naanman dak-zo jat-go gwaai beng.  
Cl refugee get-Perf one-cl strange disease  
'The refugees have got a strange disease.'

When *dak* occurs in the postverbal position, it is always adjacent to the verb. Postverbal *dak* in Cantonese does not simply mean 'to acquire'. Its interpretation varies. Consider the following examples.

- (2) 佢行得好快。 (descriptive phrase marker)  
 Keoi haang dak hou faai.  
 he walk Des very fast  
 ‘He walks very fast.’
- (3) 佢食得龍蝦。 (modal)  
 Keoi sik dak lunghaa.  
 he eat can lobster  
 ‘He can eat lobsters.’
- (4) 佢睇得三本書。 (focus operator)  
 Keoi tai dak saam-bun syu.  
 he read only three-Cl book  
 ‘He read only three books.’

In (2) *hou faai* ‘very fast’ is analyzed as a ‘descriptive phrase’. The function of *dak* in (2) is to introduce the descriptive phrase in the sentence. Without *dak*, the existence of the descriptive phrase becomes ungrammatical, as shown in (5). Postverbal *dak* in (2) is called a ‘descriptive phrase marker’ in this article.<sup>2</sup>

- (5) \*佢行好快。  
 \*Keoi haang hou faai.  
 he walk very fast  
 ‘He walks very fast.’

In (3) *dak* has a modal interpretation, which is glossed as ‘can’. In (4) the postverbal element *dak* is glossed as ‘only’. It functions as a restrictive focus operator.

Compared with the descriptive phrase marker *dak* and the modal *dak*, the usage of the focus operator *dak* is noted only by a few in the literature. Some exceptions include Rao et al. (1981), Cheng (1997), Luke (1999), and Zhang and

Ni (1999), who document the focus reading of *dak* in Cantonese. Lee (1995) discusses some properties of the postverbal focus operator *dak*. Zhang and Luke (1999) compare *dak* in Cantonese and its counterpart in a Wu dialect. However, many characteristics of this focus operator *dak* are still unknown. A detailed study on it is necessary.

In this article, quantificational properties and syntactic properties of *dak* in Cantonese will be examined, most of which have not been discussed in the literature. I will show that there are two focus *dak*'s in Cantonese and argue that the postverbal restrictive focus operator *dak* is a verbal suffix whereas the preverbal restrictive focus operator *dak* is a verb. It will be shown that the preverbal *dak* construction can be treated on a par with the cleft construction.

The organization of this article is as follows. In section 2, I investigate several properties of postverbal *dak*. In section 3, I argue that postverbal *dak* should be analyzed as a verbal suffix. In section 4, I discuss some of the properties of preverbal *dak*. In section 5, I argue that preverbal *dak* is a verb, whose function is to introduce a focalized nominal. Movement is involved in the derivation of the preverbal *dak* construction. In section 6, I discuss the scope of the sentence final focus particle *zaa* in the preverbal *dak* construction, the interaction between negation and *dak*, and the distribution of various postverbal *dak*'s in Cantonese.

## 2. SOME PROPERTIES OF THE POSTVERBAL FOCUS OPERATOR *DAK*

### 2.1 Scope of Postverbal *Dak*

The postverbal focus operator *dak* has scope over the elements following it (Lee 1995). For example, in (6) *dak* does not quantify the subject *go saam-go hoksaang* 'those three students'. Only the object *loeng-fan bougou* 'two reports' can be quantified. The subject-object asymmetry emerges when the verb is intransitive, as in (7).<sup>3</sup>

- (6) 嗰三個學生寫得兩份報告。  
 Go saam-go hoksaang se dak loeng-fan bougou.  
 that three-Cl student write only two-Cl report  
 (a) ‘Those three students write only two reports.’  
 (b) \*‘Only those three students write two reports.’
- (7) \*嗰三個學生去得。  
 \*Go saam-go hoksaang heoi dak.  
 that three-Cl student go only  
 ‘Only those students go.’

In the double object construction, either the direct object or the indirect object can be quantified by *dak*, as in (8).

- (8) a. 啲聽眾問得兩個講者呢條問題。  
 Di tingzung man dak loeng-go gongze ni tiu mantai.  
 Cl audience ask only two-Cl speaker this Cl question  
 ‘The audiences asked only two speakers this question.’
- b. 啲聽眾問得我兩條問題。  
 Di tingzung man dak ngo loeng-tiu mantai.  
 Cl audience ask only I two-Cl question  
 ‘The audiences asked me only two questions.’

Notice that in the double complement construction, in which the indirect object is a preposition phrase, *dak* has scope over the direct object instead of the indirect object, as illustrated in (9) and (10). *Bei* ‘to’ in (9) and *hai* ‘in, on’ in (10) are analyzed as prepositions in Cantonese.

- (9) a. 聖誕老人送得兩份禮物畀我。  
 Singdaanloujan sung dak loeng-fan laimat bei ngo.  
 Santa give only two-Cl gift to me  
 ‘Santa gave only two gifts to me.’

- b. \*聖誕老人送得禮物畀兩個學生。  
 \*Singdaanloujan sung dak laimat bei loeng-go hoksaang.  
 Santa give only gift to two-Cl student  
 ‘Santa gave gifts only to two students.’
- (10) a. 小明放得兩粒糖喺張檯度。  
 Siu Ming fong dak loeng-lap tong hai zoeng toi dou.  
 Siu Ming put only two-Cl candy on Cl table place  
 ‘Siu Ming put only two candies on the table.’
- b. \*小明放得糖喺兩張檯度。  
 \*Siu Ming fong dak tong hai loeng-zoeng toi dou.  
 Siu Ming put only candy on two-Cl table place  
 ‘Siu Ming put candies only on two tables.’

The elements quantified by *dak* are not necessarily arguments of the verb. Adverbial phrases, such as duration phrases (= (11)) and frequency phrases (= (12)), can be quantified by *dak* (Lee 1995).

- (11) 我尋晚瞓得三個鐘。  
 Ngo cam maan fan dak saam-go zung.  
 I yesterday night sleep only three-Cl hour  
 ‘I slept only for three hours last night.’
- (12) 佢去得一次。  
 Keoi heoi dak jat ci.  
 he go only one time  
 ‘He went only once.’

Notice that the adverbial phrase can be quantified even though there is an internal argument. For example, *keoi* ‘he’ is the argument of the verb *taam*

'visit' in (13). The argument does not block the quantification of *dak* and *dak* can quantify the duration phrase *loeng ci* 'twice'.

- (13) 我探得佢兩次。  
 Ngo taam dak keoi loeng ci.  
 I visit only he two time  
 'I visit him only twice.'

The postverbal focus operator *dak* cannot have scope over a trace formed by syntactic movement. Lee (1995) shows that *dak* cannot quantify the trace formed by topicalization (=14) and relativization (=15). '*t*' is a symbol to represent a trace.

- (14) \*呢兩本書佢睇得 *t*.  
 \*Ni loeng-bun syu, keoi tai dak *t*.  
 this two-Cl book he read only  
 'Only these two books, he read.'
- (15) \*[佢贏得 *t*] 嘅十蚊。  
 \*[keoi jeng dak *t*] ge sap man  
 he win only Mod ten dollar  
 'only ten dollars that he won'

## 2.2 Nominal and Cardinality Requirements

The postverbal focus operator *dak* requires that the focalized elements be nominal and cardinal. For example, the nominals quantified by *dak* in (16) and (17) consist of a numeral *saam* 'three'. The cardinal nominal can be quantified by *dak* regardless of whether it is definite (=16) or indefinite (=17).<sup>4</sup>

- (16) 我見得嗰三個學生。  
 Ngo gin dak go saam-go hoksaang.  
 I meet only that three-Cl student  
 ‘I meet only those three students.’

- (17) 我見得三個學生。  
 Ngo gin dak saam-go hoksaang.  
 I meet only three-Cl student  
 ‘I meet only three students.’

Given the nominal and cardinal requirements, the ungrammaticality of the following examples can be accounted for. They are ungrammatical because the elements quantified by *dak* are neither nominals (= (18) and (19)) nor cardinal phrases (= (20) and (21)). Although semantically *go hoksaang* ‘the student’ in (21) may imply that there was only *one* student, syntactically it does not include a numeral and thus (21) is ungrammatical.<sup>5</sup> *Di* in (22) is known as the ‘plural classifier’ in Cantonese (Au Yeung 1997). As the nominal in (22) does not have a numeral, (22) is still unacceptable.

- (18) \*王教授講得好慢。 (adverb)  
 \*Wong gaausau gong dak hou maan.  
 Wong professor speak only very slow  
 ‘Professor Wong speaks only very slow.’
- (19) \*啲投資者認得佢地點樣會發達。 (clause)  
 \*Di tauzize nam dak keoidei dimjoeng wui faatdaat.  
 Cl investor think only they how will rich  
 ‘The investors only think how they can be rich.’
- (20) \*我見得學生。 (bare noun)  
 \*Ngo gin dak hoksaang.  
 I meet only student  
 ‘I meet only students’

- (21) \*我見得個學生。 (singular)  
 \*Ngo gin dak go hoksaang.  
 I meet only CI student  
 ‘I meet only the student.’
- (22) \*我見得啲學生。 (plural)  
 \*Ngo gin dak di hoksaang.  
 I meet only CI(pl) student  
 ‘I meet only some students.’

### 2.3 Boundedness Requirement

Eventualities can be classified into four types: accomplishments, achievements, activities, and states (Vendler 1967, among many others). The major difference among these four types of eventualities is that contrary to accomplishments and achievements, activities and states do not have a natural endpoint.

Under the above classification of eventualities, let us consider the relation between the existence of postverbal *dak* and the eventualities in Cantonese. Apparently, postverbal *dak* can follow the predicates that denote accomplishments (=23), achievements (=24), ‘activities’ (=25), and ‘states’ (=26), provided that the nominal and cardinality requirements are fulfilled.

- (23) 小明今年寫得一篇論文。 (accomplishments)  
 Siu Ming gam nin se dak jat-pin leonman.  
 Siu Ming this year write only one-CI article  
 ‘Siu Ming wrote only one article this year.’
- (24) 呢次戰爭死得兩個士兵。 (achievements)  
 Ni ci zinzang sei dak loeng-go sibing.  
 this CI war die only two-CI soldier  
 ‘Only two soldiers died in the war this time.’



- (25) 個嗶嗶喊得半分鐘。 (‘activities’)  
 Go bibi haam dak bun fanzung.  
 CI baby cry only half minute  
 ‘The baby cried only for half a minute.’
- (26) 朵花紅得兩日。 (‘states’)  
 Do faa hung dak loeng jat.  
 CI flower red only two day  
 ‘The flower was red only for two days.’

In principle, the verb *haam* ‘cry’ denotes activities. However, due to the presence of *dak*, sentence (25) seems to convey a meaning that the baby was no longer crying. The duration phrase *bun fanzung* ‘half a minute’ marks the boundary of the event of crying. Consequently, the event conveyed by sentence (25) seems to have an endpoint and should be analyzed as a bounded event.

Furthermore, *hung* ‘red’ is an adjective, which normally denotes a state when it is used as a predicate in Cantonese, such as (27). The stative meaning of *hung* ‘red’ can be signaled by the degree word *hou* ‘very’.

- (27) 朵花好紅。  
 Do faa hou hung.  
 CI flower very red  
 ‘The flower is very red.’

According to native speakers’ judgments, the existence of *dak* in (26) implies that the flower was no longer red. The duration phrase *loeng jat* ‘two days’ marks the boundary of the event.<sup>6</sup> Given that the adjectival predicate in (26) cannot be modified by the degree word *hou* ‘very’, as shown in (28), I assume that the adjectival predicate with *dak* expresses an event that must be bounded.

- (28) \*朵花好紅得兩日。  
 \*Do faa hou hung dak loeng jat.  
 Cl flower very red only two day  
 'The flower was very red for two days.'

Based on the above discussion, the generalization is that postverbal *dak* requires that the predicate indicate a change of state, more specifically, a bounded event. This generalization is further supported by the following facts. For example, *dak* can follow the adjectival predicate *gou* 'tall' only when the predicate denotes a change of state. (29) cannot be used to describe a fact that a little child is just three feet tall. The only possible reading of (29) is that Siu Ming is just three feet *taller*. The event denoted by the predicate in (29) has undergone a change of state.

- (29) 小明高得三呎。  
 Siu Ming gou dak saam cek.  
 Siu Ming tall only three foot  
 (a) \*'Siu Ming is only three feet tall.'  
 (b) 'Siu Ming is only three feet taller.'

#### 2.4 Monosyllabic requirement

VV resultative compounds in Cantonese indicate bounded events. In principle, *dak* should be compatible with the VV compounds. However, the judgment of (30) is slightly unnatural.

- (30) (?)佢打爛得兩隻杯。  
 (?)Keoi daa-laam dak loeng-zek bui.  
 he hit-broken only two-cl cup  
 'He broke only two cups.'

The unnaturalness of (30) is not due to semantics; instead it is due to phonology. Lee (1995) observes that *dak* cooccurs better with monosyllabic

verbs. For example, *ziugu* 'look after' in (31) is a disyllabic verb and its judgment is slightly unnatural.

- (31) (?) 啲義工照顧得兩個細路仔。  
 (?) Di jigung ziugu dak loeng-go sailouzai.  
 Cl volunteer look after only two-Cl child  
 'The volunteers only look after two children.'

Postverbal *dak* can be attached to loanwords. *Print* and *present* are acceptable loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese. The contrast between (32) and (33) shows that the monosyllabic requirement also plays a role in loanwords.

- (32) 呢部機每分鐘 print 得兩張紙。  
 Ni bou gei mui fanzung print dak loeng-zoeng zi.  
 this Cl machine every minute print only two-Cl paper  
 'Only two sheets of paper are printed every minute by this machine.'
- (33) (?) 佢今年 present 得一篇論文。  
 (?) Keoi gam nin present dak jat-pin leonman.  
 he this year present only one-Cl paper  
 'He presented only one paper this year.'

#### 2.5 Prohibition of Aspect Markers

In Cantonese, there are at least four aspect markers: the perfective marker *zo*, the experiential marker *gwo*, the progressive marker *gan*, and the durative marker *zyu*. The following examples show that the existence of postverbal *dak* is incompatible with all these aspect markers.

- (34) 小明寫(\*咗)得(\*咗)兩篇文。 (perfective)  
 Siu Ming se (\*zo) dak (\*zo) loeng-pin man.  
 Siu Ming write Perf only Perf two-Cl article  
 'Siu Ming wrote only two articles.'

- (35) 小明寫(\*過)得(\*過)兩篇文。 (experiential)  
 Siu Ming se (\*gwo) dak (\*gwo) loeng-pin man.  
 Siu Ming write Exp only Exp two-Cl article  
 ‘Siu Ming has the experience of writing only two articles.’
- (36) 小明寫(\*緊)得(\*緊)兩篇文。 (progressive)  
 Siu Ming se (\*gan) dak (\*gan) loeng-pin man.  
 Siu Ming write Prog only Prog two-Cl article  
 ‘Siu Ming is writing only two articles.’
- (37) 小明揸(\*住)得(\*住)兩個袋。 (durative)  
 Siu Ming zaa (\*zyu) dak (\*zyu) loeng-go doi.  
 Siu Ming hold Dur only Dur two-Cl bag  
 ‘Siu Ming is holding only two bags.’

### 3. POSTVERBAL FOCUS OPERATOR *DAK* AS A VERBAL SUFFIX

Lee (1995) proposes that the postverbal focus operator *dak* is a ‘prenominal quantifier’. According to him, *dak* and the object *saam-bun syu* ‘three books’ in (38) (=4) form a constituent. He assumes that *dak* is adjoined to the nominal. The partial representation of (38) is illustrated in (39).

- (38) 佢睇得三本書。  
 Keoi tai dak saam-bun syu.  
 he read only three-Cl book  
 ‘He read only three books.’

- (39) ... [<sub>VP</sub> V [<sub>NP</sub> *dak* NP]]

Lee (1995) points out that there are two pieces of evidence supporting his analysis. Firstly, *dak* + the focalized nominal can occur as the subject (=40),

the indirect object (=41)), and some preverbal prepositional objects (=42)). The data and judgments are from Lee (1995).

- (40) 呢度得三個人識英文。  
 Nidou dak saam-go jan sik jingman.  
 here only three-Cl person know English  
 ‘Here only three people know English.’
- (41) 舊年老闆發獎金畀得五個人。  
 Gau nin loubaan faat zoenggam bei dak ng-go jan.  
 last year boss issue bonus give/to only five-Cl person  
 ‘Last year, the boss issued bonuses only to five people.’
- (42) ?對得五個人演講，冇乜意思。  
 ?Deoi dak ng-go jan jin’gong, mou mat jisi.  
 to only five-Cl person lecture not much meaning  
 ‘There is not much point in lecturing only to five people.’  
 (Lee 1995)

Secondly, Lee (1995) points out that the quantified object can be fronted along with *dak* in topicalization. (43) seems to be evidence for Lee’s analysis of *dak*.

- (43) 得三本書，佢睇咗。  
Dak saam-bun syu, keoi tai-zo.  
 only three-Cl book he read-Perf  
 ‘Only three of the books, he read.’

Apparently, *dak* seems to be adjoined to the focalized nominal. Nevertheless, Lee’s analysis faces some empirical problems. First of all, *dak* with the focalized nominal in the subject position should not be the same as that in the object position. For example, the focalized nominal in the subject position is not subject to the cardinality requirement. Consider the contrast between (44)

and (45). Bare nominals can only be preceded by preverbal *dak* instead of postverbal *dak*.

- (44) 得老人家識講呢種方言。  
 Dak lou jangaa sik gong ni zung fongjin.  
 only old person know speak this Cl dialect  
 ‘Only the old people know this dialect.’

- (45) \*我幫得老人家。  
 \*Ngo bong dak lou jangaa.  
 I help only old person  
 ‘I helped only the old people.’

Secondly, *dak* cannot follow prepositions, such as *hai* ‘on’ in (46).

- (46) \*小明放左啲糖[喺得一張檯度]。  
 \*Siu Ming fong-zo di tong [hai dak jat-zoeng toi dou].  
 Siu Ming put-Perf Cl candy on only one-Cl table place  
 ‘Siu Ming put the candies only on one table.’

Regarding the grammaticality of (41), *bei* in (41) could be analyzed as a verb (cf. (9)), as indicated in the gloss originally given by Lee. If *bei* in (41) is a verb, (41) will then be classified as the serial verb construction instead of the double object construction (or the dative construction).

Regarding (42), *deoi* in Cantonese can be used as a verb meaning ‘to face’. The durative aspect marker *zyu* can be attached to the verb *deoi*, as in (47). If *bei* in (41) and *deoi* in (42) are analyzed as verbs, the generalization of the morphology of postverbal *dak* is that it follows only verbs.

- (47) 我屋企對住座山。  
 Ngo ukkei deoi-zyu zo saan.  
 I home face-Dur Cl mountain  
 ‘My house is facing the mountain.’

Thirdly, *dak* cannot follow a nominal in the postverbal position. For example, (48) and (49) would be wrongly ruled in if *dak* and the focalized nominal form a constituent (cf. (8) and (13)).

- (48) \*啲聽眾問我得兩條問題。  
 \*Di tingzung man ngo dak loeng-tiu mantai.  
 Cl audience ask I only two-Cl question  
 ‘The audiences asked me only two questions.’
- (49) \*我探佢得兩次。  
 \*Ngo taam keoi dak loeng ci.  
 I visit he only two time  
 ‘I visited him only twice.’

Fourthly, regarding the evidence from topicalization in (43), the ungrammaticality of (50) shows that the so-called ‘*dak* + the focalized nominal’ topic cannot be ‘reconstructed’ to the object position when the verb is followed by the perfective aspect marker *zo*. The claim that postverbal *dak* and the focalized nominal form a constituent is dubious.

- (50) \*佢睇咗得三本書。  
 \*Keoi tai-*zo* dak saam-bun syu.  
 he read-Perf only three-Cl book  
 ‘He read only three books.’

By virtue of the fact that postverbal *dak* always follows the verb and should be adjacent to the verb, I conclude that morphologically postverbal *dak* is a verbal suffix. The partial representation of the postverbal *dak* construction should be (51) instead of (39).

- (51) ... [<sub>VP</sub> V-*dak* NP]

Claiming that the postverbal focus operator *dak* is a verbal suffix is not unfounded. For example, the non-focus postverbal *dak*'s in Cantonese, such as those in (2) and (3), are assumed to be verbal suffixes in the literature (Cheung 1972, among many others).

#### 4. SOME PROPERTIES OF PREVERBAL *DAK*

Both preverbal *dak* and postverbal *dak* have similar semantic functions in Cantonese. Apparently, these two elements could be treated on a par. Nevertheless, in what follows, I argue that they should not be the same.

##### 4.1 Scope of Preverbal *Dak*

The following examples show that preverbal *dak* can quantify the subject (=52), the direct object (=53, (54), and (55)), the indirect object (=56), duration phrases (=57), frequency phrases (=58), locative phrases (=59), and temporal phrases (=60).

- (52) 得我發表意見。 (subject)  
 Dak ngo faatbiu jigin.  
 only I express opinion  
 'Only I express opinions.'
- (53) 得一份報紙我可以推薦。 (direct object)  
 Dak jat-fan bouzi ngo hoji teozin.  
 only one-Cl newspaper I can recommend  
 'I can recommend only one newspaper.'
- (54) 得啲糖小明放咗喺張檯度。  
 Dak di tong Siu Ming fong-zo hai zoeng toi dou.  
 only Cl candy Siu Ming put-Perf on Cl table place  
 'Siu Ming put only the candies on the table.'



- (55) 得兩條問題啲聽眾問過我。 (indirect object)  
Dak loeng-tiu mantai di tingzung man-gwo ngo.  
only two-Cl question Cl audience ask-Exp I  
'The audiences have asked me only two questions.'
- (56) 得我啲聽眾問過呢啲問題。 (duration)  
Dak ngo di tingzung man-gwo nidi mantai.  
only I Cl audience ask-Exp these question  
'The audiences have asked only me these questions.'
- (57) 得三個鐘我可以瞓。 (frequency)  
Dak saam-go zung ngo hoji fan.  
only three-Cl hour I can sleep  
'I can sleep only for three hours.'
- (58) 得兩次王教授可以申請研究撥款。 (location)  
Dak loeng ci Wong gaasau hoji sancing jingau butfun.  
only two time Wong professor can apply research grant  
'Professor Wong can apply for the research grant only twice.'
- (59) 得呢個房我可以有自由。 (temporal)  
Dak ni-go fong ngo hoji jau zijau.  
only this-Cl room I can have freedom  
'I can have freedom only in this room.'
- (60) 得今日我可以寫我嘅文。 (temporal)  
Dak gamjat ngo hoji se ngo ge man.  
only today I can write I Mod paper  
'I can write my paper only today.'

Similar to postverbal *dak*, preverbal *dak* cannot have scope over traces. The focalized element must be overt and must follow *dak* linearly. The trace in (61) is created by topicalization and that in (62) is created by relativization.

- (61) \*小明呀, 得 *t* 識講泰文。  
 \*Siu Ming-aa, dak *t* sik gong Taai man.  
 Siu Ming-Top only know speak Thai language  
 ‘As for Siu Ming, only he can speak Thai.’
- (62) \*[得 *t* 識講泰文]嘅廚師  
 \*[dak *t* sik gong Taai man] ge cyusi  
 only know speak Thai language Mod cook  
 ‘only the cook who can speak Thai’

It is not the case that preverbal *dak* can occur in any preverbal position. A salient property of preverbal *dak* is that it is always on the left periphery of a clause regardless of what element is focalized. Although *dak* in the *zoeng*-construction in (63) is preverbal, it is not on the left periphery of a clause. The *zoeng*-construction is the counterpart of the *ba*-construction in Mandarin.

- (63) \*我將得兩隻杯洗咗。  
 \*Ngo zoeng dak loeng-zek bui sai-zo.  
 I take only two-Cl cup wash-Perf  
 ‘I washed only two cups.’

Notice that preverbal *dak* is on the periphery of a *clause* and not necessarily on the periphery of a *sentence*. For example, the focalized object can occur either in the matrix clause (=64a) or in the embedded clause (=64b).

- (64) a. 得呢幅畫我知道[小明最鍾意]。  
Dak ni-fuk waa ngo zidou [Siu Ming zeoi zungji].  
 only this-Cl picture I know Siu Ming most like  
 ‘I know that Siu Ming likes only this picture most.’

- b. 我知道[得呢幅畫小明最鍾意]。  
 Ngo zidou [dak ni-fuk waa Siu Ming zeoi zungji].  
 I know only this-Cl picture Siu Ming most like

Elements that are on the left of preverbal *dak* seem to be analyzed as topics. For example, the topic marker *-aa* can be attached to *Siu Ming* in (65).

- (65) 小明呀，得呢幅畫最鍾意。  
 Siu Ming-aa, dak ni-fuk waa zeoi zungji.  
 Siu Ming-Top only this-Cl picture most like  
 ‘As for Siu Ming, he likes only this picture most.’

#### 4.2 Nominal Requirement

Compared with postverbal *dak*, preverbal *dak* has much more freedom regarding the choice of the focalized element. It seems that the only requirement of preverbal *dak* is that the focalized element must be a nominal phrase. The following examples are unacceptable because the focalized element is a non-nominal adverb in (66), a PP in (67), and a VP in (68).

- (66) \*得好小心我揭開個蓋。  
 \*Dak hou siusam ngo kit-hoi go goi.  
 only very careful I take-open Cl cover  
 ‘I open the cover only carefully.’
- (67) \*得係張檯度小明放咗啲糖。  
 \*Dak hai zoeng toi dou Siu Ming fong-zo di tong.  
 only on Cl table place Siu Ming put-Perf Cl candy  
 ‘Siu Ming put the candies only on the table.’

- (68) \*得講幾句話我相信佢絕對可以。  
 \*Dak gong gei-geoi waa ngo soengseon keoi zyutdeoi hoji.  
 only say few-Cl word I believe he definitely can  
 ‘Only say a few words, I believe that he definitely can.’

The cardinality requirement does not apply to preverbal *dak* (cf. (69)). Either definite nominals (= (69)), indefinite nominals (= (70)), or bare nouns (= (71)) may follow preverbal *dak*.

- (69) 得呢份報紙我鍾意睇。 (definite)  
 Dak ni-fan bouzi ngo zungji tai.  
 only this-Cl newspaper I like read  
 ‘I like reading only this newspaper.’
- (70) 得兩個學生嚟見我。 (cardinal)  
 Dak loeng-go hoksaang lei gin ngo.  
 only two-Cl student come see I  
 ‘Only two students came to see me.’
- (71) 得菜我可以食。 (bare noun)  
 Dak coi ngo hoji sik.  
 only vegetable I can eat  
 ‘I can eat only vegetables.’

#### 4.3 The Choice of Predicates

The following examples show that the predicate in the preverbal *dak* construction may denote either accomplishments (= (72)), achievements (= (73)), activities (= (74)), or states (= (75)). Unlike postverbal *dak*, the predicate in the preverbal *dak* construction does not necessarily denote a change of state. For example, the verb *haam* ‘cry’ in (74) denotes an event that does not have a natural endpoint. The possibility of having the degree word *hou* ‘very’ in (75) implies that the adjectival predicate denotes a state.

- (72) 得小明寫咗篇文章。 (accomplishments)  
 Dak Siu Ming se-zo pin man.  
 only Siu Ming write-Perf Cl article  
 ‘Only Siu Ming wrote the article.’
- (73) 得兩個士兵死咗。 (achievements)  
 Dak loeng-go sibing sei-zo.  
 only two-Cl soldier die-Perf  
 ‘Only two soldiers died.’
- (74) 得呢個嗲嗲喊。 (activities)  
 Dak ni go bibi haam.  
 only this Cl baby cry  
 ‘Only this baby is crying.’
- (75) 得呢朵花好紅。 (states)  
 Dak ni do faa hou hung.  
 only this Cl flower very red  
 ‘Only this flower is very red.’

Other constraints imposed on the predicates in the postverbal *dak* construction, such as the avoidance of monosyllabic verb (=76) and the prohibition of aspect markers (=77), (78), (79), and (79)), do not apply to the predicates in the preverbal *dak* construction.

- (76) 得啲義工照顧嗰班細路仔。 (disyllabic verbs)  
 Dak di jigung ziugu go baan sailouzai.  
 only Cl volunteer look after that Cl child  
 ‘Only the volunteers look after those children.’

- (77) 得小明寫咗篇文章。 (Perfective)  
 Dak Siu Ming se-zo pin man.  
 only Siu Ming write-Perf Cl article  
 ‘Only Siu Ming wrote the article.’
- (78) 得小明寫過文。 (Experiential)  
 Dak Siu Ming se-gwo man.  
 only Siu Ming write-Exp article  
 ‘Only Siu Ming has the experience of writing articles.’
- (79) 得小明寫緊篇文章。 (Progressive)  
 Dak Siu Ming se-gan pin man.  
 only Siu Ming write-Prog Cl article  
 ‘Only Siu Ming is writing the article.’
- (80) 得小明揸住個袋。 (Durative)  
 Dak Siu Ming zaa-zyu go doi.  
 only Siu Ming hold-Dur Cl bag  
 ‘Only Siu Ming is holding the bag.’

I notice that there is an interesting asymmetry between arguments and adverbial elements in the preverbal *dak* construction. When an argument is quantified by preverbal *dak*, for example, the object *ni bun syu* ‘this book’ in (81), either an episodic reading (=81a) or a modality reading (=81b) is possible. On the contrary, when an adverbial element is quantified by preverbal *dak*, such as the duration phrase *saam-go zung* ‘three hours’ in (82), the felicitous reading of the sentence is the modality reading.

- (81) a. 得呢本書我睇過。  
 Dak ni bun syu ngo tai-gwo.  
 only this Cl book I read-Exp  
 ‘I have read only this book.’

- b. 得呢本書我可以睇。  
 Dak ni bun syu ngo hoji tai.  
 only this Cl book I can read  
 ‘I can read only this book.’
- (82) a. ??得三個鐘我瞓咗。  
 ??Dak saam-go zung ngo fan-zo.  
 only three-Cl hour I sleep-Perf  
 ‘I slept only for three hours.’
- b. 得三個鐘我可以瞓。  
 Dak saam-go zung ngo hoji fan.  
 only three-Cl hour I can sleep  
 ‘I can sleep only for three hours.’

#### 4.4 Summary

So far, I have shown various properties of preverbal *dak* in Cantonese. Based on the discussion in this section, the similarities and differences between preverbal *dak* and postverbal *dak* can be summarized in (83). In the following table, ‘object’, ‘subject’, ‘adverbial elements’, and ‘trace’ refer to the elements that *dak* can have scope over. ‘Nominal phrases’ and ‘non-nominal phrases’ refer to the categorial status of the focalized elements. ‘Events’, ‘aspect markers’, and ‘prosodic requirement’ refer to the constraints imposed on the predicates. ‘σ’ is the symbol for a syllable.

(83) *Comparison of preverbal dak and postverbal dak*

|                      | <b>Preverbal <i>dak</i></b> | <b>Postverbal <i>dak</i></b> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Object               | OK                          | OK                           |
| Subject              | OK                          | *                            |
| Adverbial elements   | OK                          | postverbal                   |
| Trace                | *                           | *                            |
| Nominal phrases      | OK                          | cardinal                     |
| Non-nominal phrases  | *                           | *                            |
| Events               | all                         | bounded                      |
| Aspect markers       | OK                          | *                            |
| Prosodic requirement | σ, σσ                       | σ, ?σσ                       |

I have argued that morphologically postverbal *dak* is attached to verbs. By virtue of its morphological status, a close relationship between postverbal *dak* and the verb is expected. It is not surprising to see that there are some particular constraints imposed on the verb in the postverbal *dak* construction.

What is the status of preverbal *dak*? I will discuss the syntax of preverbal *dak* in the next section.

## 5. SYNTAX OF PREVERBAL DAK

5.1 Categorial Status of Preverbal *Dak*

Preverbal *dak* must be adjacent to the focalized nominal. Apparently, preverbal *dak* and the nominal seem to form a constituent so that *dak* is part of the noun phrase, as what Lee (1995) claims. After presenting the data, I will discuss how the following examples suggest that preverbal *dak* is a verb.

## (84) 嘆番杯紅酒先。

Taan-faan bui hung zau sin.  
 Enjoy-back CI red wine first  
 'Let me have a glass of red wine first.'



- (85) 每(\*番)個同事都用嗰套舊軟件。  
 Mui(\*-faan) go tungsi dou jung go tou gau jyungin.  
 every(-back) CI colleague all use that CI old software  
 ‘Every colleague uses the old software.’
- (86) 得番百幾間中學可以用英文教學。  
 Dak-faan baak gei gaan zunghok hoji jung jingman gaauhok.  
 only-back hundred several CI high school can use English teach  
 ‘Only about a hundred high schools can teach in English.’

It is widely assumed in the literature that morphologically *faan* is a suffix that is only attached to verbs (Zhan 1958, Cheung 1972, among others). Literally, it means ‘back, return’. In (84) *faan* ‘back’ is attached to the verb *taan* ‘enjoy’, indicating a return to a certain state. The quantifier *mui* ‘every’ in (85) is part of the noun phrase and is not a verbal element. The ungrammaticality of attaching *faan* ‘back’ to *mui* ‘every’ in (85) is expected. In (86), *faan* ‘back’ can be attached to preverbal *dak*. The grammaticality of (86) suggests that preverbal *dak* is a verb and should not be part of the noun phrase.

Let us consider another example in (87). Although *jat-go tungsi* ‘one colleague’ in the second conjunct in (87) is not preceded by *dak*, semantically *jat-go tungsi* ‘one colleague’ seems to be quantified by *dak* having a focus reading. The coordination test in (87) shows that *dak* and the quantified nominal should not form one constituent.

- (87) 得兩個同事續約，一個同事升級。  
 Dak loeng-go tungsi zuk-joek, jat-go tungsi singkap.  
 only two-CI colleague continue-contract one CI colleague promote  
 ‘Only two colleagues can renew their contracts and only one colleague can be promoted.’

To claim that preverbal *dak* is a verb is not without basis. In Cantonese, *dak* can be used as a verb, which means ‘only have’, for instance, (88) and (89).

- (88) 我得十五分鐘。點可以講晒篇文呀?  
 Ngo dak sapng fanzung. Dim hoji gong-saai pin man aa?  
 I only-have fifteen minute how can talk-all Cl paper Q  
 'I only have fifteen minutes. How can I present the whole paper?'
- (89) 佢得把口。  
 Keoi dak baa hau.  
 he only-have Cl mouth  
 'Lit.: He has only a mouth. (He goes on cackling without laying an egg.)'

Based on these considerations, I conclude that preverbal *dak* is a verb.

### 5.2 Movement in the Preverbal *Dak* Construction

I have shown that the sequence of preverbal *dak* + the focalized nominal always occurs in the clause initial position. How do we put the focalized nominal in the clause initial position? I will argue for a movement approach to the derivation of preverbal *dak* in Cantonese. Consider the following examples, in which 'e' indicates a gap that is associated with the focalized nominal.

#### *Subject island*

- (90) \*得兩個代表我相信[佢見咗 e]有啲問題。  
 \*Dak loeng-go doibiu ngo soengseon [keoi gin-zo e] jau di mantai.  
 only two-Cl representative I believe he meet-Perf have Cl problem  
 'I believe that [that he met only two representatives] has some problems.'

#### *Complex NP island*

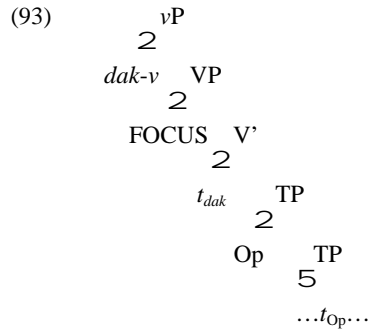
- (91) \*得一篇論文佢肥晒[嗰啲[交 e]嘅學生]。  
 \*Dak jat-pin leonman keoi fei-saai [godi [gaau e] ge hoksaang].  
 only one-Cl paper he fail-all those hand-in Mod student  
 'He failed all those students who handed in only one paper.'

*Adjunct island*

- (92) \*得兩個顧客老闆[因為 *e* 嚟]而好唔開心。  
 \*Dak loeng-go guhaak loubaan [janwai *e* lei] ji hou m hoisam.  
 only two-Cl customer boss because come then very not happy  
 ‘The boss was not happy because only two customers came.’

Subject island, complex NP island, and adjunct island are examples of strong islands. The grammaticality judgments of the examples in (90), (91), and (92) show that the preverbal *dak* construction is sensitive to strong islands. Given that sensitivity of strong islands is considered diagnostic of *wh*-movement, *wh*-movement should be involved in the derivation of the preverbal *dak* construction.

I propose that (93) is the partial representation for the preverbal *dak* construction in Cantonese.



Given that preverbal *dak* is a verb, I assume that it selects a focalized nominal (=‘FOCUS’) and a clause (=Tense Phrase or ‘TP’) in its argument structure,<sup>7</sup> projected within the Verb Phrase ‘VP’. The focalized nominal and the clause are in the specifier position and the complement position of *dak*, respectively, as illustrated in (93). Consequently, the nominal requirement imposed on the focalized nominal is attributed to the subcategorization (c-selection) of *dak*.

Furthermore, I assume with Chomsky (1995) that there is a light verb phrase ‘vP’ dominating VP. Huang (1994) independently argues that verbs move

out of VP in Chinese. Along these lines, I assume that the verb *dak* in (93) eventually moves to the light verb *v* deriving the right word order.

In the structure in (93), the focalized nominal is base-generated in the specifier of VP. To derive the island effects in the preverbal *dak* construction, I assume that the gap in the clausal complement is a trace created by moving a null operator (=‘Op’). The null operator undergoes movement and is adjoined to the embedded clause, namely the embedded TP in (93), from where it is then predicated of the focalized nominal.

Along these lines, the clausal complement of *dak* is not an argument of the verb; instead it should be regarded as a ‘predicate’ realized by the null operator structure. By connecting the null operator with the focalized nominal (in terms of predication or control), the null operator structure is interpreted as the ‘secondary predicate’ of the focalized nominal. Consequently, *dak* in the preverbal *dak* construction should be treated as an intransitive verb with one argument (i.e. the focalized nominal) and a secondary predicate.

From a semantic point of view, the structure proposed in (93) is motivated. The null operator movement in the clausal complement in (93) can be regarded as an operation that converts a proposition into a predicate denoting a property. In semantics, such an operation is known as ‘lambda conversion’. In other words, the null operator movement in (93) is a syntactic correlate of lambda conversion.<sup>8</sup>

Lambda expressions contain a free variable. The free variable is bound by the operator lambda. By binding this variable by lambda, an abstract, i.e. the function (94), is created, whose value for some argument *a* is denoted by substituting *a* for every occurrence of *x* in *F(x)*. The lambda expression in (94) may be thought of as denoting a property, i.e. that the expression denotes ‘having the property *F*’ or ‘being an *x* such that *F(x)* is true’. The abstract in (94) corresponds to a predicate.

$$(94) \quad \lambda x[F(x)]$$

Let us consider (95a) (=81a), in which the object *ni bun syu* ‘this book’ is focalized. According to the analysis of null operator movement, the embedded clause in (95a) is converted into a predicate denoting the property of

'being an  $x$  such that I have read  $x$ ' by null operator movement. An informal representation is given in (95b). As the focalized nominal *ni bun syu* 'this book' (= 'FOCUS') fits the property denoted by the predicate, it is said to be the semantic subject of the predicate.

- (95) a. 得呢本書我睇過。  
 Dak ni bun syu ngo tai-gwo.  
 only this Cl book I read-Exp  
 'I have read only this book.'
- b. FOCUS [<sub>TP</sub> Op [<sub>TP</sub> ...<sub>top</sub> ...]]

Recall that *dak* in Cantonese literally means 'to acquire, to have, to get'. In the preverbal *dak* construction, *dak* selects a secondary predicate as its complement. The focalized nominal, which is projected in the specifier of VP, is considered to be the semantic subject of the primary predicate *dak* and the secondary predicate. An appropriate paraphrase of the structure in (93) will be (96).

- (96) The focalized nominal acquires the property of  $x$ .

If the discussion is on the right track, the syntactic structure proposed in (93) for the preverbal *dak* construction is not *ad hoc* and should be motivated by semantics.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.3 Preverbal *Dak* Construction as a Cleft Sentence

(97) is a canonical cleft sentence in English, in which the focalized nominal *John* is introduced by the copula *be*.

- (97) It was John who I met yesterday.

I notice that there are some similarities between preverbal *dak* and the copula *be* in English clefts. First of all, both *dak* and *be* introduce a focalized

element in the structure. The focalized element is followed by a predicate denoting a property that is predicated of the focalized element.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, both *dak* and *be* are verbs. Recall that the literal meaning of *dak* in Cantonese is 'to have, to acquire'. It has been shown that there is a close relationship between 'be' and 'have' cross-linguistically (Freeze 1992, Kayne 1993). Choosing these two verbs to introduce a focalized element in natural languages does not seem to be a coincidence.

Thirdly, both *dak* and *be* do not have an external argument. The grammatical subject *it* in English clefts is an expletive that is nonreferential and semantically null. The existence of *it* in English clefts perhaps is to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). On the other hand, (98) shows that *dak* should not have a subject or an 'external argument' on the surface. If *dak* does not allow an (overt) external argument, the existence of *Siu Ming* in (98) becomes redundant and thus ungrammatical. Hence, the grammatical subject of *dak* is always empty on the surface.<sup>11</sup>

- (98) \*小明得呢本書我睇過。  
 \*Siu Ming dak ni-bun syu ngo tai-gwo.  
 Siu Ming only this-Cl book I read-Exp  
 '\*Siu Ming I read only this book.'

Fourthly, *wh*-movement is involved in both the preverbal *dak* construction and the cleft construction in English. I have argued that the preverbal *dak* construction involves a relation that meets the *wh*-diagnosis. Since the advent of transformational grammar, it has been assumed that English cleft sentences are derived by movement, on a par with relative clauses. The rationale for the *wh*-movement in cleft sentences is to interpret the embedded clause as a property predicated of the focalized element that precedes it.

Fifthly, both *dak* and *be* cannot convey aspectual meanings. For example, aspect markers cannot be attached to preverbal *dak*, as in (99). In English clefts, *be* does not inflect to convey the aspectual meaning, as in (100).

- (99) \*得咗/過/緊小明寫論文。  
 \*Dak-zo/gwo/gan Siu Ming se leonman.  
 only-Perf/Exp/Prog Siu Ming write paper  
 ‘Only Siu Ming wrote/has written/is writing papers.’
- (100) \*It had been/was being John who I met yesterday.

Based on these similarities, it seems plausible to treat the preverbal *dak* construction in Cantonese on a par with the clefts in English.

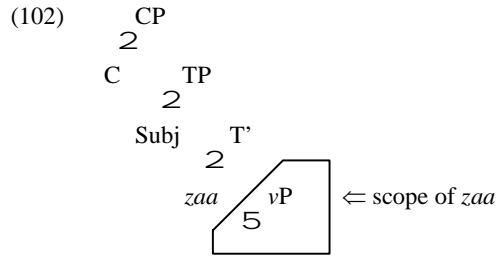
## 6. SOME REMAINING ISSUES

### 6.1 Scope of *Zaa*

The sentence final particle *zaa* in Cantonese is a restrictive focus particle. The scope of *zaa* exhibits locality effects. The generalization is that *zaa* does not have scope over the subject and any pre-subject elements (Tang 1998). For example, either the verb *tai* ‘read’ or the object *ni bun syu* ‘this book’ may be focalized in (101). The subject *ngo* ‘I’ is excluded from the scope of *zaa*.

- (101) 我睇咗呢本書咋。 (\*Subj/V/Obj)  
 Ngo tai-zo ni bun syu zaa.  
 I read-Perf this Cl book Perf  
 ‘I only read this book.’

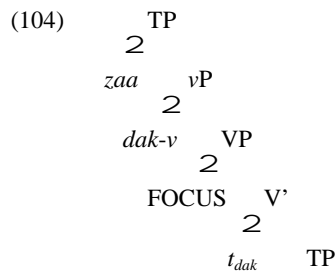
I argue elsewhere that *zaa* is an overt realization of T (=Tense) and for this reason, elements that are c-commanded by *zaa*, including those dominated by *vP*, can be focalized (Tang 1998). All elements beyond T cannot be focalized by *zaa*. The relation is schematized in (102).<sup>12</sup>



In (103) *ngo* ‘I’ is the subject of the predicate *tai-zo ni bun syu* ‘read this book’. Interestingly, when preverbal *dak* occurs, *zaa* can have scope over the subject, as in (103). Apparently, (103) is a counterexample to the generalization that *zaa* does not have scope over the subject.

- (103) 得我睇咗呢本書咋。  
 Dak ngo tai-zo ni bun syu zaa.  
 only I read-Perf this Cl book only  
 ‘Only I read this book.’

Regarding the interpretation of (103), the intuition is that the scope of *zaa* is ‘forced’ to extend its scope to the subject position by virtue of the existence of preverbal *dak*. To implement such an intuition, I propose that *zaa* is not the head of the embedded TP; instead, it is an overt realization of T that dominates the verb *dak* in the structure. In other words, *zaa* is in the matrix clause. The so-called focalized ‘subject’ in (103) is in fact the ‘object’ of the verb *dak*, i.e. in the specifier of the matrix VP, as shown in (104).





In sum, (103) does not pose a problem to the generalization of *zaa* that *zaa* does not have scope over the subject. As the focalized nominal is the ‘object’ of *dak*, it is c-commanded by *zaa* in the matrix clause and it is still under the scope of *zaa*, conforming to the generalization that *zaa* does not have scope over the subject. The analysis of preverbal *dak* presented in this article accounts for the grammaticality of (103) straightforwardly.

## 6.2 Negation and *Dak*

In Cantonese, there are three negations, namely *m*, *mou*, and *mei*. The negation *m* negates a state (including modal), *mou* and *mei* negate an event. Consider the following examples.

(105) 佢唔眼瞓。  
Keoi m ngaanfan.  
he not sleepy  
‘He is not sleepy.’

(106) 佢冇嚟。  
Keoi mou lei.  
he not come  
‘He did not come.’

(107) 佢未嚟。  
Keoi mei lei.  
he not,yet come  
‘He has not come yet.’

The differences between postverbal *dak* and preverbal *dak* emerge when negations occur. All these three forms of negation can occur in the preverbal *dak* construction, as shown in (108).<sup>13</sup> It seems that the predicate + *dak* cannot be negated directly, as shown in (109).

- (108) a. 得佢唔眼瞓。  
Dak keoi m ngaanfan.  
only he not sleep  
'Only he is not sleepy.'
- b. 得佢冇嚟。  
Dak keoi mou lei.  
only he not come  
'Only he did not come.'
- c. 得佢未嚟。  
Dak keoi mei lei.  
only he not.yet come  
'Only he has not come yet.'
- (109) a. \*佢唔睇得兩本書。  
\*Keoi m tai dak loeng-bun syu.  
he not read only two-Cl book  
'He does not read only two books.'
- b. \*佢冇睇得兩本書。  
\*Keoi mou tai dak loeng-bun syu.  
he not read only two-Cl book  
'He did not read only two books.'
- c. \*佢未睇得兩本書。  
\*Keoi mei tai dak loeng-bun syu.  
he not.yet read only two-Cl book  
'He has not read only two books yet.'

It is argued that *m* in Cantonese is a verbal prefix (Yip 1988). Recall that no aspect markers can be attached to the verb when there is *dak*. I suspect that Cantonese morphology does not allow any affixes to be attached to the V +

*dak* predicate complex. If my conjecture is correct, the ungrammaticality of (109a) and attaching the aspect markers to the V + *dak* predicate complex should be treated on a par.

Notice that *mou* and *mei* are not affixes. The analysis of (109b) and (109c) should be different. Recall that postverbal *dak* requires a bounded event. In other words, postverbal *dak* asserts the existence of the event conveyed by the predicate. From a functional point of view, an event that does not exist cannot be bounded and thus (109b) and (109c) are unacceptable.<sup>14</sup>

The only possible way to negate the postverbal *dak* construction is to use the negation *m* by inserting the copula *hai* 'be' so that *m* becomes a sentential negation. Notice that there is a salient contrast between preverbal *dak* and postverbal *dak* with respect to the scope of the negation. (110) shows that postverbal *dak* has a narrow scope reading. On the contrary, (111) shows that preverbal *dak* has a wide scope reading.

(110) 我唔係睇得兩本書。

Ngo m hai tai dak loeng-bun syu.

I not be read only two-Cl book

'It is not the case that I read only two books.' (Neg > Only)

(111) 得兩本書我唔係睇。

Dak loeng-bun syu ngo m hai tai.

only two-Cl book I not be read

'Only two books, I do not read.' (Only > Neg)

The interpretations of (110) and (111) are predictable: postverbal *dak* is c-commanded by *m* in (110) whereas preverbal *dak* always c-commands *m* in (111).

### 6.3 Variants of Postverbal *Dak*

In the beginning of this article, I pointed out that the postverbal element *dak* in Cantonese has many functions. For example, in (112) *dak* is a descriptive phrase marker that introduces a descriptive phrase, such as *hou faai* 'very fast'.

In (113) *dak* is a modal, which is glossed as ‘can’. Postverbal *dak* in (114) is a focus operator that introduces a focus object.

- (112) 佢行得好快。 (=2)  
 Keoi haang dak hou faai.  
 he walk Des very fast  
 ‘He walks very fast.’
- (113) 佢食得龍蝦。 (=3)  
 Keoi sik dak lunghaa.  
 he eat can lobster  
 ‘He can eat lobsters.’
- (114) 佢睇得三本書。 (=4)  
 Keoi tai dak saam-bun syu.  
 he read only three-Cl book  
 ‘He read only three books.’

What are the environments of the occurrence of these three different *dak*’s in Cantonese?

I have pointed out that the postverbal focus operator *dak* introduces only cardinal nominals. Consequently, *dak* should not be interpreted as the focus operator when it is followed by a non-cardinal nominal.

The descriptive phrase marker *dak* only introduces a descriptive phrase, for instance, an adjectival predicate. In other words, whenever postverbal *dak* is followed by a descriptive phrase, it is likely that *dak* is the descriptive phrase marker.

It seems that the modal *dak* either introduces a noun, such as *lunghaa* ‘lobster’ in (113), introduces an adjective, such as *faai* ‘fast’ in (115), or follows an intransitive verb, such as *heoi* ‘go’ in (116).

(115) 佢行得快。  
 Keoi haang dak faai.  
 he walk can fast  
 ‘He can walk fast.’

(116) 你去得。  
 Nei heoi dak.  
 you go can  
 ‘You can go.’

In certain contexts, *dak* in (115) could be interpreted as the descriptive phrase marker. However, the modal reading of (115) is still salient. On the other hand, *dak* in (112) can never be interpreted as a modal in any event. No ambiguity arises.

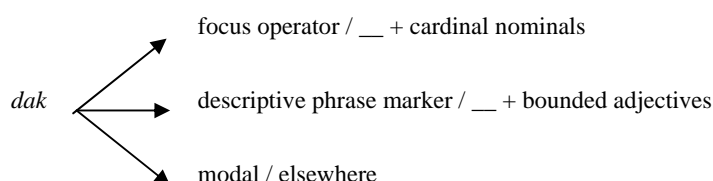
With respect to the modal reading, the contrast between (112) and (115) is interesting: *dak* must be a descriptive phrase marker when it precedes a descriptive phrase that is bound by a degree word, such as *hou* ‘very’. The degree word plays an important role in determining the interpretation of *dak*. Along these lines, I assume that the adjectival predicate *faai* ‘fast’ in (115) is in fact bound by a covert degree word, which is supplied by the context, so that *dak* in (115) is interpreted as the descriptive phrase marker. The ambiguity of (115) is due to the (non)existence of the covert degree word.

Among the cardinal nominals, *dak* must be interpreted as the focus operator when it is followed by an indefinite cardinal nominal. If the cardinal nominal is definite, the interpretation is ambiguous. For example, (117) could have two different readings, depending on the context. However, it seems that the focus reading is the salient reading of (117). I assume that the focus reading is the ‘unmarked’ reading of (117).

- (117) 我睇得呢三本書。  
 Ngo tai dak ni saam-bun syu.  
 I read only/can this three-Cl book  
 (i) 'I read only these three books.' (✓)  
 (ii) 'I am allowed to read these three books.'

In (118), let me summarize the environments that the three postverbal *dak*'s may occur. '\_\_\_' indicates the position that postverbal *dak* occurs.

- (118) *Conditions of the emergence of various postverbal dak's*



## 7. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have shown some constraints imposed on the postverbal restrictive focus operator *dak* in Cantonese and argued that it is a verbal suffix instead of being adjoined to a noun phrase, contra Lee's (1995) claim.

The focus *dak* may occur in the preverbal position in Cantonese. I have argued that the preverbal *dak* construction should not be derived from the postverbal *dak* construction. Preverbal *dak* is a verb that introduces a focalized nominal. Movement is involved in the derivation of the preverbal *dak* construction. It is suggested that the preverbal *dak* construction can be treated on a par with clefts in English.

In addition, I have discussed the relation between *dak* and the focus sentence final particle *zaa*, the relation between *dak* and negation, and the conditions of the occurrence of several postverbal *dak*'s in Cantonese.

Due to limited space, I cannot have an overall study of *dak* in this article. I hope, however, that the work presented here is a first step towards

accounting for a set of interesting data related to *dak* in Cantonese as well as the typology of *dak/de* (得) in Chinese languages. Much work remains to be completed and will be the subject of future research.

## NOTES

\* Preliminary versions of this article were presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Cantonese and Other Yue Dialects held at the University of Hong Kong, June 26-28, 1999, Seminar of Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, September 22, 1999, and the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Association of the Southwest at the University of Texas at San Antonio, October 1-3, 1999. I would like to thank participants at these occasions for comments. Special thanks to Ben Au Yeung, Jianhua Hu, Thomas Lee, Sui-Sang Mok, Haihua Pan, Carine Yiu, and Anne Yue for helpful discussion. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewer for valuable suggestions. All errors and shortcomings in this article remain my responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> Cantonese romanizations in this article follow the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong Cantonese Romanization Scheme. Tones are omitted. The following abbreviations are used in giving glosses for Cantonese examples: Cl: classifier, Des: descriptive expression marker, Dur: durative aspect marker, Exp: experiential aspect marker, Mod: modifier marker, Perf: perfective aspect marker, Prog: progressive aspect marker, Res: resultative phrase marker, and Top: topic marker. For ease of presentation, the third person singular pronoun *keoi* in Cantonese is glossed as 'he' in English.

<sup>2</sup> In Mandarin the counterpart of *dak* in (2) is *de*, which can introduce either a descriptive phrase or a resultative phrase. However, *dak* in Cantonese only introduces a descriptive phrase. Resultative phrases use *dou*, which literally means 'arrive', as in (i).

- (i) 佢行到好拗。  
 Keoi haang dou hou gui.  
 he walk Res very tired  
 'He walked till he was tired.'

<sup>3</sup> (7) is acceptable only when *dak* is interpreted as the modal. In what follows, non-focus interpretations of *dak* are ignored.

<sup>4</sup> According to the judgments of Lee (1995), *dak* cannot quantify definite nominals, departing from the judgments of the native speakers I consulted with.

<sup>5</sup> The grammaticality of (21) may further support the claim that [CI + N] sequence in Cantonese is not derived from [one + CI + N] by deleting the numeral (Cheng and Sybesma 1999). Otherwise, the judgment of (21) would be the same as that of (i), which is perfectly acceptable.

- (i) 我見得一個學生。  
 Ngo gin dak jat-go hoksaang.  
 I meet only one-CI student  
 'I met only one student.'

<sup>6</sup> Although the duration phrase *loeng jat* 'two days' in (26) marks the boundary of the event, it should not be analyzed as a resultative phrase or a descriptive phrase. (i) shows that the duration phrase can follow the predicate without *dak* (but the existence of the perfective marker *-zo* in (i) seems to be obligatory). Consequently, *dak* in (26) should not be a descriptive phrase marker. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to these issues.

- (i) 朵花紅咗兩日。  
 Do faa hung-zo loeng jat.  
 CI flower red-Perf two day  
 'The flower has been being red for two days.'

<sup>7</sup> The embedded clause is regarded as TP instead of CP (=Complementizer Phrase) because CP but not TP is a 'phase', in the sense of Chomsky (1998).

<sup>8</sup> Such an analysis of the preverbal *dak* construction is inspired by Huang's (1999) analysis of Chinese long passives.



<sup>9</sup> To explain the grammaticality of (87), I assume that the two conjuncts are VPs, both of which are in the complement position of the light verb *v*. *Dak* undergoes across-the-board (ATB) movement from the two conjuncts to the light verb, as schematized in (i).

(i) [<sub>VP</sub> *dak-v* [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>VP1</sub> FOCUS1 *t<sub>dak</sub>* ... ] and [<sub>VP2</sub> FOCUS2 *t<sub>dak</sub>* ... ]]]

<sup>10</sup> See Delahunty (1984) for a discussion on the semantic properties of English clefts.

<sup>11</sup> Huang et al (1998) argue that empty expletives are allowed only with predicates that do not govern any argument structures containing a proto-agent role in Mandarin Chinese. Along these lines, as preverbal *dak* does not have a 'proto-agent' argument, there could be an 'empty expletive' in the subject position.

<sup>12</sup> Irrelevant details are omitted in (102), in which C and CP stand for 'Complementizer' and 'Complementizer Phrase', respectively. To derive the right word order, *zaa* moves to C followed by TP-to-CP movement in the phonological component and thus *zaa* is always in the sentence final position. The derivation is shown in (i). See Tang (1998) for details.

(i) [<sub>CP</sub> *zaa-C* [<sub>TP</sub> ... *t<sub>zaa</sub>* ... ]] ⇒ [<sub>CP</sub> TP [<sub>C</sub> *zaa-C* *t<sub>TP</sub>*]]

<sup>13</sup> As pointed out by Anne Yue (personal communication), preverbal *dak* cannot be negated by *mou* 'not' and *m* 'not', as shown in (i). The only possible way to negate preverbal *dak* is to use *m hai* 'not be', as in (ii).

(i) \*冇/\*唔得佢寫文。  
 \*Mou/\*m dak keoi se man.  
 not/not only he write paper  
 'Not only he writes papers.'

(ii) 唔係得佢寫文。  
 M hai dak keoi se man.  
 not be only he write paper  
 'It is not the case that only he wrote papers.'

<sup>14</sup> The analysis of the relation between *dak* and the negations *mou* and *mei* is reminiscent of the relation between the perfective aspect marker *le* and the negations in Mandarin Chinese suggested by Li and Thompson (1981).

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## 焦點與粵語的“得”

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本文討論了粵語焦點運符“得”的各種特點。粵語焦點運符“得”可以出現在兩個位置：一個出現在動詞之後，一個出現在動詞之前。本文認為這兩個焦點運符“得”並不是相同的：出現在動詞後面的焦點運符“得”是一個動詞後綴，而出現在動詞前面的“得”是一個動詞。動詞前“得”的句子可以當作“分裂句”來處理。此外，本文也討論了“得”與焦點句末助詞“咋”的關係、“得”與否定詞的關係、幾個不同意義的動詞後綴“得”的出現條件等問題。