"Should We All Tearfully Vote for You *le1*?": the Use of Utterance Final Particles in Cantonese Political Discourse

Helen Wan

Pepperdine University

helen.wan@pepperdine.edu

Abstract:

This paper investigates the specific pragmatic functions of Cantonese utterance final particles (UFPs) employed in televised political debates broadcast in 2016 New Territories East by-election. The paper explores the most frequently used UFPs and discusses how they are being employed with various questioning strategies to help project negative stance. Using Stance Triangle proposed by Du Bois (2007), I look into how different stance-taking activities are navigated through different questioning techniques as well as UFPs which ultimately led to dis-alignment among the electoral candidates. The preliminary findings show that the most frequently used UFPs are *le1* and *aa3* which are two relatively neutral particles in daily conversation and are used in all types of question such as polar questions, alternative questions, and content questions (Matthews & Yip, 2011). The findings suggest that these particles could serve as a pragmatic mitigator, for example, in rhetorical questions or questions that started with a hostile preface. Take a question from one of the candidates as an example, "and you think that your party is (already) dominating (in the Legislative Council), so do you want all of our citizens to blindly and tearfully vote for you *le1*?" in which the question ends with a *le1* particle to soften her hostile tone of voice. This paper will also provide a revised stance triangle that helps understand how the negative stances being navigated in different question strategies and UFPs. Discovering the true stance objects uncovers the question designs are usually oriented to the voters.

References:

Du Bois, J.W. (2007). The stance triangle. In Englebretson, R. (Ed.), *Stancetaking in Discouse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (pp.139-182). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Matthews, S. & Yip, V. (2011). *Cantonese: A comprehensive grammar*. London; New York: Routledge.