

The Use of the *bei* in Contemporary Spoken Cantonese

Different grammatical status of *bei* in Cantonese have been studied among linguists, and the relationship between different usages of *bei* has aroused wide concern (Chin 2009, 2011; Yiu, 2010). However, the current use of *bei* in contemporary spoken Cantonese is less focused. Going beyond a rather narrowed view on scrutinizing the synchronic use of *bei* in Guangzhou and Hong Kong spoken Cantonese corpora, this research is under a bigger framework in investigating native speakers' comprehension and production of sentence structures with *bei*, with a purpose of exploring the language dynamic changes across time and geographical areas. To be specific, Cantonese in this research refers to the Guangfu cluster under Yue Dialect represented by Guangzhou Cantonese and Hong Kong Cantonese.

From the literature, at least six usages of *bei* are identified, namely a) *bei* as a verb of giving, b) *bei* as an indirect object marker, c) *bei* as a beneficiary marker, d) *bei* as a causative verb, e) *bei* as a passive marker and f) *bei* as an instrument marker (Chin, 2011). By analyzing *bei* in two spoken Cantonese corpora, namely Guangzhou Hua Kouyu Yousheng Yuliao Ku (Guangzhou Cantonese Spoken Corpus) and PolyU Corpus of Spoken Chinese, this study reintegrates the six usages by combining b) and c) to *bei* a dative marker, and adding another usage of *bei* — *bei* as a conjunction, which received little attention before.

Each grammatical function of *bei* has specific sentence structures and preferred sentence patterns are found varying across regions. To explore if there are differences in the cognitive process of native Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, an acceptability judgment task (AJT) and a structural priming task (SPT) will be conducted to probe the mechanisms of comprehension and production of native speakers in two places.

Reference

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