

**The Cartography of Sentence-Final Particles in Yue Chinese –
Evidence from Comparative Analysis and Language Contact**

by

CHAN, Tsan Tsai

Division of Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Science
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Abstract

In this thesis, I test Cinque's (1999) cartographic theory that grammatical items with the same meaning appear in the same relative position in any natural language. I focus on the sequence of sentence-final particles (SFPs, also *geoi3mut6 zo6ci4* 句末助詞 or *mei5jam1* 尾音), words which are normally found at the end of sentences in certain languages and express various meanings, from grammatical time to surprise and annoyance.

My data comes largely from Yue Chinese, which is rich in SFPs. Comparing the sequence of SFPs in four Yue varieties (Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Singapore Cantonese, alongside Tangxia Siyi Yue) with that in other Chinese and non-Chinese languages, I find that in different languages, SFPs with certain meanings can appear in more than one position. Having SFPs similar in meaning appear in different positions does not fit in with the theory that grammatical items are assigned to one position based on the meaning they express.

I work out a theoretical explanation for this apparent deviation and propose that SFPs with similar meanings but occupying different positions may in fact belong to different grammatical classes. The label "SFP" would therefore refer to several grammatical classes, instead of just one. To support this theory, I discuss how languages with SFPs borrow these words from each other. I show in the process that borrowing affects SFPs differently if they occupy different positions, even though they may be similar in meaning. Associated empirical problems are also discussed. (245 words)