

Permissive Verbs in Hong Kong Cantonese: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives

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Abstract

The present thesis studies the permissive verbs in Hong Kong Cantonese *bei2* 畀, *zeon2* 准, *joeng6* 讓, *jam6* 任, *jau4dak1* 由得 and *dang2* 等 from synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

First, the feature of each permissive verb in question is discussed. It is demonstrated that *bei2* 畀 is the generic permissive verb while the others each contain an idiosyncratic specification in addition to signifying the action of giving permission.

Second, the multiple functions exhibited by the permissive verbs are discussed. It is shown that *bei2* 畀 also exhibits the functions of a letting verb, a permissive modal auxiliary verb and a passive and/or agent marker. *Zeon2* 准 also carries the permissive modal auxiliary verb function. *Jam6* 任 can also function as a letting verb and an adverb of manner. *Jau4dak1* 由得 can also serve as a letting verb and its similar form *jau4* 由 can be used as a passive and/or agent marker. *Dang2* 等 is also a causing verb and an unexpective subordinating conjunction.

Third, the historical development of the multiple functions of the permissive verbs is discussed. On the one hand, it is argued that the letting verb function of *bei2* 畀, *jam6* 任 and *jau4dak1* 由得, the permissive auxiliary verb function of *bei2* 畀 and *zeon2* 准, the adverb-of-manner function of *jam6* 任 and the passive and/or agent marker function of *bei2* 畀 are directly derived from their permissive verb function. On the other hand, it is shown that the passive and/or agent marker function of *jau4* 由 and the causing verb function of *dang2* 等 as well as its unexpective conjunction function are in fact not derived from their permissive verb function.