

What's borrowed, and what's not: revisiting the *which*-construction in Hong Kong Cantonese

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Introduction

- Relative constructions (RCs) are found across languages

- (1) a. 阿芬一直住喺 [佢好鍾意嘅] 香港 Cantonese
 b. She lives in New York, [which she likes]. English

- Pre-nominal (head-final RCs) vs. post-nominal (head-initial RCs)
- Linking word *ge* vs. relative pronouns

Introduction

- In colloquial conversations and writings, there is a “hybrid” type of RCs in Cantonese.
- (2) a. 我唔中意佢嘅意見，*which* Δ does not mean 我憎佢。 (Chan 1992, p.9)
- b. 佢見到部電話 *which* 佢話想買 Δ 啲。 (T.-C. Leung 2001, p.58)
- (3) a. 細路返工就有 滿足感 (*which* 佢地返學一直得唔到 Δ)
- b. 佢之後收到 第一封信，*which* Δ 係信用咭公司寄嚟要佢還錢
- c. 雖然 我份人比較直接 (*which* 佢地唔鐘意 Δ)
- The signature property of this type of RCs is usage of the English relative pronoun *which*.
 - I call this emerging type of RCs ***which*-RCs**.

Introduction

- This construction receives some serious attention in Leung (2010).
- It has been taken as an instance of **lexicosyntactic transference** (Li 1999; Leung 2010).
 - Lexical borrowing of the relative pronoun *which*
 - Syntactic borrowing of relative structures of English
- However, I argue that *which*-RCs merely instantiates a case of lexical borrowing.
 - *Which*-RCs displays some canonical properties of RCs.
 - But they also show properties not shared to RCs in Cantonese and English.
- Neither English-style relative structures nor post-modification gets into Cantonese grammar.

Introduction

- The proposal:
 - The parallel between *which*-RCs and English RCs are only superficial.
 - The relative pronoun *which* is borrowed as a **clausal-level grammatical marker that specifically introduces non-at-issue proposition** (i.e., appositives).
 - The grammatical function of *which* as a relative pronoun is bleached.
 - Rather, it merely introduce a declarative clausal element.

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Basic properties of *which*-RCs

- Lexicosyntactic transference
- Similarities to English relative structures
 - ① Nominal and clausal relativization
 - ② “Gap”-less relative structures
 - ③ Long-distance
 - ④ Medial position

① Nominal and clausal relativization

- The missing constituents in a *which*-RC can be various grammatical relations and categories.

- (4) a. 自由選擇配料我地揀左 芝士、蘑菇同燒雞肉 which Δ
係一個我極度推薦的配搭 subjects
- b. 我唔明白點解又要唱多次 《電影院禮儀曲》 ,
which你係紅館已經玩過 Δ 一次 objects
- c. 佢ig po同你親密selfie , 十成九想
引佢ex reply story 要佢attention , which佢成功咗 VP
- d. 例如 覺得當日個樣唔好睇,張相唔好睇 (which好多人都會 Δ)
VP
- e. 雖然 我份人比較直接 (which佢地唔鐘意) full clauses

① Nominal and clausal relativization

- Note that Cantonese does not allow clausal relativization, which is attributable to the use of *ge3*.

(5) a. *佢成功咗嘅 引佢 *ex reply story*

b. *佢地唔鐘意嘅 我份人比較直接

- In contrast, English allows clausal relativization in appositive clauses

(6) a. I told Max to *leave* , which he never did. (Citko 2008)

b. *Fairley is not here* , which bothers Green. (Citko 2008)

c. John *helped me move* , which Mary avoided despite promising to.
(p.c. Adam Woodnutt)

② “Gap”-less relative structures

- *Which*-RCs without a gap - resumption(-like) type

- (7) a. 有 幾張可撕memo紙 which 佢地痴住左d重點 pronouns
- b. 其實啖交點解會傷感情，有 兩大主因，…… which
其實兩者可以共通 pro-forms
- c. 唔能夠 批評呢啲唔合理嘅事 (which 呢個係我職責) dem.
- d. 無特別發展 Online marketing, which
好似大圍趨勢向緊呢邊走 dem.

- Note that the resumption options go beyond pronouns.

③ Long distance dependency

- (i) Separation between the head noun and the base position
 - (8) a. 可能要做 簡單報告 ... *which* 個人覺得 [_{CP} Δ 係意義不大]
 - b. 部分反轉式唔支援 手寫筆 , *which*個人覺得 [_{CP} Δ 係win平板最大賣點之一]
- (ii) Separation between the relative clause and the head noun it modifies
 - (9) a. 雙層咖啡 都有同啲奶撈埋一齊 *which* 我自己個人來講唔係太鍾意 Δ
 - b. 然後又拎左 個牛角包 俾胖胖, *which* 佢其實唔食得 Δ

③ Long distance dependency

- Note that postposing canonical RCs in Cantonese is disallowed.

(10) ??然後又拎左 個牛角包 俾胖胖, 佢唔食得 Δ 嘅。

- In this regard, *which*-RCs share syntactic similarities with appositive clauses in English.

- (11) a. [A man] was noticed [who carried a red suitcase]. (de Vries 1999)
- b. I have seen [Ann] yesterday, [who is our director]. (Citko 2008)

④ Medial position

- While most *which*-RCs appear sentence-finally, there are sentence-medial cases (contra Leung 2010)

- (12) a. 就算真係個pateint錯帶漏野 (in which你唔係 Δ) ,
都唔可能用呢個態度咯
- b. 有個咖喱朋友 (which 佢真係好好) 分享話,
其實佢地fing得頭通常都係表示友好
- c. 因為下次which 一定會有下次 無人知仲會唔會咁簡單咁好彩
- d. 所以話就算香港收皮 (in which 已經是進行式)
都唔會係台狗汁雞而係坡佬執曬d 著數
- This is also similar to English relative structures.

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Against syntactic borrowing

- *Which*-RCs show properties that are not observed in English, and even not in Cantonese RCs.
 - 1 Restricted choice of relative pronouns
 - 2 Non-canonical “gap”-less structures
 - 3 Island insensitivity
 - 4 Cross-sentential association
 - 5 The occurrence of SFPs

① Restricted choice of relative pronouns

- Borrowing of a particular lexical item, rather than a whole paradigm of relative pronouns.
- No relative pronoun other than *which* is allowed.

- (13)
- *我一直都想返香港，where 係我長大嘅地方
 - *我識鄧老師，who is 我以前嘅mentor
 - *我食過一種白身魚，that 得日本嘅北陸先有
 - *我睇過呢本書，whose 個作者淨係寫過一本書

- All these cases become possible if we change the relative pronoun to *which*, despite mismatches in person or animacy.
- It is unlikely that post-nominal modification is borrowed from English.

① Restricted choice of relative pronouns

- There are some variants of the relative pronouns.
- An additional verb may appear in *which*-RCs.

- (14) a. 佢比較水一d，可能佢唔用粉佢淨杰佢，which is 我鍾意既
 b. 有時會彈入message request, which means
 佢大可以禁個交叉然後唔理你既提問
 c. 留意返係坐嗰班人嘅29%，Which mean 係130x0.45x0.19

- But subject agreement seems to be irregular:

- (15) *我買咗幾本linguistics嘅書，which are 今年新出嘅

① Restricted choice of relative pronouns

- There are some apparent cases of pied-piping of preposition in *which*-RCs.

- (16) a. 差啲以為會好壓抑咁完——in which已經好正，點知仲未完
 b. 原來佢默默咁係度等左我幾年 In which 佢知我中途有女

- But this is not to say pied-piping is generally allowed.

- (17) a. *阿明一早知道呢件事，on which 佢有少少唔同嘅意見
 b. *我幾中意巴士，by which 我日日搭返學

- All variants contain *which*, and seem to be conventionalized.
 i.e., *which*, *which is*, *which means*, and *in which* are the only licit forms.

② Non-canonical “gap”-less structures

- As mentioned, “gap”-less relative structures are common.
- But *which*-RCs allow the “gap” to be occupied by elements other than pronominals.

(18) (Imperfect) copies

- 叫我地睇 album ， which 個album 只有1x幾相
- 呢啲防曬產品入面都要添加 唔少化學物質 保持水潤
which 啲化學物質就係你想avoid嘅成份

(19) Verbal anaphora

Richard仲 包緊佢全部醫療費 ， [Which佢責任上唔洗噉做]

② Non-canonical “gap”-less structures

- More importantly, *which*-RCs allow the head noun and the RC to be merely semantically associated in a direct or indirect way.

- (20) a. 同時去學唱歌 增強自己唱歌嘅能力 which 個成果
真係好明顯好明顯
- b. 機翼都係彎的 一係就相比人ps造假
一係就 個photographer 進入左量子尺度導致時空結構不穩定，
which可能性 tend to zero
- (21) a. 佢有時係唔係好識處理呢啲事 which佢會幾蝕底
- b. 我手上的是比較適合油性肌膚，which我都算是個油面人
- But they are not found in English, neither in Cantonese.
 - *Which*-constructions develop usages that are not typical of relative structures.

③ Island insensitivity

- The relative clauses can be associated with a head noun within a syntactic island.
- (i) Complex NP islands

(22) a. 我同佢都鍾意食 榴槤 , which佢比我更鍾意 Δ

b. 我同佢都鍾意食 榴槤 , which我一早就聽過 [佢比我更鍾意 Δ 嘅講法]

(23) a. 喺活動贏左 新Wifi router禮物 , which我而家拎 Δ 黎自用

b.(?) 我同阿明講返 [我喺活動贏左 新Wifi router禮物 嘅事] ,
which我而家拎 Δ 黎自用

The syntactic position of the relative clauses

- (ii) Adjunct islands

- (24) a. 話我架車有味，係因為佢要 sell 我買 汽車香精，which 我完全冇話要 Δ 就畀佢插咗喺車頭。
- b. 因為佢要 sell 我買 汽車香精，所以話我架車有味，which 我完全冇話要 Δ
- (25) a. 細路返工就有 滿足感 (which 佢地返學一直得唔到 Δ)
- b. 細路返工就有 滿足感 (which [因為佢地返學一直得唔到 Δ ，所以佢地通常都好有動力])
- These observations support a base generation of *which*-RCs, against a movement approach.

④ Cross-sentential association

- Cross-sentential *whcih*-RCs

(26) Leung 2010, p.35

- A: 我想知點解佢做 呢個題目 。
- B: *which* 唔係而家講嘅 。

- Clausal intervention

(27) 佢食 生菜 時好驚喜，問我點解肯落咁多油嘅，
[*which*佢覺得好好食]

- *Which*-RCs are more syntactically independent than canonical RCs.

⑤ The occurrence of SFPs

- SFPs can occur within *which*-RCs.

- (28) a. 我係話 你啲手勢唔乾淨 喎 which 你自己已經承認咗 啦
- b. 睇戲同食甜品 呀 ! Which 係我人生中無法抗拒的兩件事
- c. 但 佢真係好重視佢既事業 囉 which is 係我好欣賞 既

- This further shows that *which*-RCs should be regarded as an independent utterance.

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Which-RCs as appositives

- Based on these novel observations, I suggest that the *which*-construction is not evidence for structural borrowing from English relative structures (*pace* **Chan:2022a**; Leung [2010](#)).
- Instead, I propose that the relative pronoun *which* is borrowed as a **clausal-level connective that specifically introduces non-at-issue proposition**.
- This at best is a case of lexical borrowing, with semantic extension.

Which-RCs as appositives

- This analysis is further supported by parallels with the interpretation of English appositive clauses in terms of, following **Schlenker:2020**; Potts (2005),
 - 1 Scope-less properties
 - 2 Exhaustivity
 - 3 Non-triviality condition

Scope-less properties

- When embedded under intentional contexts with a potential epistemic agent, *which*-RCs are still oriented to the speaker, rather than the matrix subject.

(29) 阿明好擔心如果 Peter 做咗會長，*which* 其實佢一定唔會選到，會令個組織冇晒公信力。

- The speaker thinks that Peter won't be elected as chairperson.
 - If the proposition is attributed to Aaming, the sentence should be degraded.

Exhaustivity

- The addition of a canonical RC weakens the meaning of the sentence, whereas the addition of a *which*-RC strengthens it.

- (30) a. 阿明翻譯過唔多過五份文件。
- b. Restrictive interpretation; non-exhaustive
阿明翻譯過唔多過五份 [老闆尋日用英文寫] 嘅文件。
- c. Non-restrictive interpretation; exhaustive
阿明翻譯過唔多過五份文件，*which* [老闆尋日用英文寫] 嘅。

- (b) does not entail that all the documents Aaming translated are written by the boss in English.
- (c) does entail such a meaning.

Non-triviality condition

- *Which*-RCs obey a non-triviality condition, similar to appositives, unlike presupposition.

- (31) 王老師係一個頂尖嘅語言學者，
- 而在座嘅同學都知道王老師係一個頂尖嘅語言學者。 (where 知道 is a presupposition trigger)
 - # 當記者訪問王老師，*which* 係一個語言學嘅頂尖學者，記者嘅態度相當友善。

- Although the presupposition is trivially true in (a), it is still felicitous.
- The proposition introduced by *which*-RCs is also trivially true in (b), it results in infelicity/redundancy.

Which-RCs as appositives

- These observations support the suggestion that the relative pronoun *which* is borrowed as a **clausal-level connective that introduces non-at-issue proposition**.
 - *Which* is a grammatical marker of appositives, plausibly an overt counterpart of a pause.
- In most cases, *which* and a pause are interchangeable.
- But in sentence-medial position, *which* is preferred.

- (32) a. 就算真係個pateint錯帶漏野 (in which你唔係 Δ) ,
都唔可能用呢個態度咯。
- b. ?就算真係個pateint錯帶漏野 (pause)你唔係 Δ (pause) ,
都唔可能用呢個態度咯。

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Conclusions

- The *which*-construction involves lexical borrowing but less likely syntactic/structural borrowing.
- This finding shows that it does not defy the Matrix Language Frame Model (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 2002), contra Chan (2022).
- Note that *which*-RCs are not unique to Cantonese, but are also common in Mandarin colloquial writings:

- (33)
- 你看起來就是那種男朋友長相，*which* 你根本不是，你這個Monster
 - 先是吃着西瓜葡萄圣女果看了《Luca》，*which*我三刷
 - 這次主題是【愛用文具】，*which*我可以聊三天三夜
 - 比模考的要難一些，主要涉及了一些很基礎的概念*which*我基本都忘了
 - 昨晚我讀完了*which*那位女士非常生氣
 - 回去之後覺得不爽想再出來（*which*個人感覺概率不小）會比較麻煩
 - 還稍微差一點小女孩的那種銳度 *which* is 這種慢板抒情歌的殺手鐮
 - 整個過程從來都不公開透明，*which*剛剛好違背了區塊鏈的本質

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