

Clausal parentheticals in Chinese: the semantics of *which* in code-mixing speech

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Introduction

- **Which-constructions**

→ the use of English *which* in code-mixing speech in Chinese.

(1) Cantonese

佢見到部電話 which 佢話想買㗎。 (T. C. Leung (2001), p.58)

Keoi gin-dou bou dinwaa [which keoi waa soeng mai] wo5.

3SG see-ASP CL telephone WHICH 3SG say want buy SFP

‘He has seen a telephone, which he says he wants to buy.’

(2) Mandarin

常見的只有越南粉 which我不喜歡 (Social media)

Changjian de zhiyou Yuenanfen [which wo bu xihuan].

common DE only Vietnamese.noodle WHICH I not like

‘Only Vietnamese noodle is common, which I do not like’

- This talk discusses the semantic contribution of *which*.

Backgrounds of *which*-constructions

- *Which*-constructions receive very limited attention in the literature.
- But examples in Cantonese have been noticed in 1990s.

(3) 我唔中意佢嘅意見， **which** does not mean 我憎佢。 (Chan (1993), p.9)
 Ngo m-tungji keoi ge jigin, [which does not mean ngo zang
 I not-agree 3SG GE opinion WHICH DOES NOT MEAN I hate
 keoi].
 3SG

‘I do not agree to his opinions, which does not mean I hate him.’

- There are speaker variations, and *which*-constructions are most acceptable among college students.

Backgrounds of *which*-constructions

- Recent internet searches reveal that the prevalence of *which*-constructions may be underestimated.
 - More than 400 instances in Cantonese and Mandarin are collected in Nov-Dec, 2022,
 - from the internet of different sources, including forums, social network services, blogs, interviews, etc.
- Although *which*-constructions have not been documented in Mandarin so far, they are commonly spotted on the internet.

Backgrounds of *which*-constructions

• Cantonese examples:

聽講老闊入嘅貨都係新鮮同埋高質嘅貨，which我食親都覺得係正！

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

我發現就算係落到嚟呢度嘅人，都未必對呢度有positive嘅感覺，which 我有時都明。

果位唯一一位正常既同事已經頂唔順，比左notices 一月會走，Which 我完全明白。

話我架車有味，係因為佢要 sell 我買汽車香精，which 我完全冇話要就畀佢插咗嘅車頭。

因為我見有啲文章提到做BA最好識SQL, R, Python, Tableau (which我全部都係識少少),

喺活動贏左新Wifi router禮物，which我而家拎黎自用

我手上的是比較適合油性肌膚，which我都算是個油面人

如果 905 拆線後，做到荔枝角道西行及/或海壇街附近一段南昌街北行 (which 我兩樣都做到)，914 無必要再行

佢話只有打filler 才可以~ which 我覺得無謂

然後又拎左個牛角包俾胖胖，which 佢其實唔食得

個水樽只用再生嘅plastic 去造，係好神奇好magic 嘅一件事㗎，in which 佢地唔用石油

我同佢都鍾意食榴槤，which佢比我更鍾意

宮崎粒聲唔出，一係就係積犯有經驗俾人審慣，which佢唔係，一係就收埋更多秘密，驚一講嘢會漏更多口風。

據hehe朋友所講 佢睇到好虐心，which佢真係唔靚仔 喺呢個圈唔係好搵到想搵到嘅嘢

佢ig po同你親密selfie，十成九想引佢ex reply story 要佢attentionO:-)，which佢成功㗎

Day6 呢一晚我地轉地方，住嚟之前去錯果間，which佢既scale係大好多

佢有時係唔係好識處理呢啲事 which佢會幾蝕底

佢就答我，依家獅一個更重要既人... which 佢既意思係我。

師姐同陳師父問唔中指導我同阿媽一啲步法同手勢，which比起喺課堂上一個導師對咁多人，宜家變咗你有乜唔明

<https://www.openrice.com/en/hongk>

<https://www.openrice.com/en/hongk>

<https://www.facebook.com/FormSoc>

<https://www.facebook.com/Montess>

<https://hk.sports.yahoo.com/news/香>

<https://www.onmygrad.com/question>

<https://www.carousell.com.hk/p/link>

<https://blog.ulifestyle.com.hk/article/>

<https://www.hkitalk.net/HKITalk2/thre>

<https://beautytalk.com.hk/頸紋/>

<https://www.openrice.com/en/hongk>

<https://m.facebook.com/kingjerenter>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CiFUV>

<https://medium.com/@rwaterblow/粵>

<https://liihkg.com/thread/332838/pag>

<https://liihkg.com/thread/2743190/pa>

<https://blog.ulifestyle.com.hk/article/>

<https://m.hkgolden.com/thread/6164>

<https://community.she.com/topic/20>

<https://hyacinthlam.wordpress.com/>

Backgrounds of *which*-constructions

- Mandarin examples:

P2.2 的 RSI 有 38.5, <i>which</i> 即係表示近期股價或有上升趨勢	https://crocodilesn.wordpress.com
NFT是在公链上链, 而数字藏品则是自己编织的联盟链, <i>which</i> 它没有得到国际的认可。	http://www.sqxb.com/2022/sqyj_1114/2808.html
Millions of 家庭农场主 <i>which</i> 已经绝迹	https://blog.wenxuecity.com/myblog/47609/201112/7251.htm
life is a struggle when 我不知道要劝自己去去还是劝自己不去	https://x.com/baeksmuurf/status/1706558466998104540?s=
Jellycat 发福小狗, [<i>which</i> 像极了假期的我。]	http://xhslink.com/Kma9sv
Here, 有個活生生的例子 <i>which</i> 是反面教材	https://crocodilesn.wordpress.com/tag/車路士/
Gay Times雜誌稱他是中國LGBT的平權大使, 是中國Gay圈的Icon。(Which 其實並沒	https://ppfocus.com/hk/0/faf2ef1e1.html
fill 就吹得有点拖沓, 和音也稍微有点不准 <i>which</i> 已经经过了后期修音)	https://cremosin69.rssing.com/chan-67966132/all_p4.html
CIC发信通知申请状态更新 (<i>which</i> 昨天就查到了呵呵)。	https://www.uscardforum.com/t/topic/34284/477?page=24
China不在openai提供服务的范围内, 超范围使用是违反用户协议的, [<i>which</i> 你注册时必	https://x.com/Aer0_X1/status/1643299147364306944?s=20
Ben问的却是我朋友被抓去非法矫正了或卖药被抓了这些[in <i>which</i> 法律根本没有半点用的	https://weibo.com/7832640538/4957152180963151
Angelica Ross表示Emma Roberts和Billie Lourd (<i>which</i> 她很喜欢) 都是会在充斥着白人	https://weibo.com/7811626607/NkEPjrXQr
讓消費者開心地以「打折後」的可愛價格 (<i>which</i> 其實就是合理版的原價) 購入商品。	https://www.frecklstudio.com/journal-ch/discounting-ch
露西喜欢她的新裙子[<i>which</i> 她妈妈买给她的]	
還有如果你是耶穌[<i>which</i> 你不是]你是個混蛋	https://exchristian.hk/forum/viewthread.php?tid=3494
飙车顺序是Bat→WW到WW→Bat, <i>which</i> 你要说这是互攻我竟无法反驳	https://lantheo.lofter.com/post/39d362_b5e91dc
整个过程从来都不公开透明, <i>which</i> 刚刚好违背了区块链的本质	https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/45486279
影射也非常多 <i>which</i> 我觉得还蛮精彩的。	https://movie.douban.com/review/12969947/?dt_dapp=1
增高鞋唯一不好的点就是在地铁里会被把手撞到头 [<i>which</i> 没穿增高鞋的时候从未发生过	https://m.weibo.cn/status/4958282205627375?jumpfrom=we
需要复习之前讨论过的理论[<i>which</i> 完全没法想]。	https://x.com/evelyn6162/status/1460266385448353798?s=

Backgrounds of *which*-constructions

Remark: *which*-constructions do not exclusively appear in written forms.

- ① K. W. Leung (2010) recorded 20 spontaneous/naturalistic examples in a diary kept for three months.
- (4) 我講緊係SPACE 喺北角嘅 campus , *which* 佢係接觸唔到嘅。
‘I am talking about the SPACE campus in North Point, which they cannot reach.’
- ② An interview transcript in this 2015 HKU BA thesis:
- (5) 其實都包咗有values 呢樣嘢囉, *in which*
其實可以幫到佢地去develop 一個creative...critical thinking 嘅
‘(It) includes values, which can foster their creative thinking.’

Backgrounds of *which*-constructions

- I therefore assume that *which*-constructions has gradually become part of Chinese.
- Most of the reported data today are based on these instances, with slight modifications in some cases.
 - Unacceptable cases are based on three native speakers who self-identify themselves as users of *which*-constructions.

Goals

- I argue that *which* is lexically borrowed from English, and it introduces a **parenthetical clause**.
 - *which*-constructions involve *no relative structures*, *contra* syntactic borrowing as suggested in T. C. Leung (2001) and Chan (2022).
 - *Which*-constructions are similar to English clausal parentheticals.
- (6) We do not need to begin with the children – [they will follow] – but with the adults. (Blakemore:2006)
- The difference is that *which* denotes an **overt parenthetical force operator** in the sense of Koev:2022.
 - But it similarly introduces a proposition that is *projective, declarative and non-obligatorily at-issue*.

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Not relative clauses

- Earlier characterizations suggest that *which*-constructions involve a postmodifying structure (Chan 1993).
- K. W. Leung (2010) explicitly argues that

*“The relative construction follows English grammar, **forming a post-modifying relative clause** with an English relative pronoun which preposed to the beginning of the clause” (p.63; emphases mine)*
- It has been taken as an instance of **lexicosyntactic transference** (Li 1999; K. W. Leung 2010; Chan 2022).
 - Lexical borrowing of the relative pronoun *which*
 - Syntactic borrowing of the post-modifying relative structures of English

Not relative clauses

- However, at least two observation show that *which*-constructions should be differentiated from relative structures.
- ① **Gap-less cases:** there is no gap in the *which*-construction. Rather, it is merely discourse-related with the host clause.

(7) 佢有時係唔係好識處理呢啲事 which佢會幾蝕底 [C], Forum
 Keoi m-hai housik cyulei ni-di si [which] keoi wui gei
 3SG not-be know handle this-CL thing WHICH 3SG will quite
 sitdai].
 disadvantaged
 ‘S/he doesnt handle these things well. S/he would be quite disadvantaged.’

Not relative clauses

- ② **Cross-utterance cases:** they can be used sentence-initially (and contain a different SFP).

(8) a. 我聽過你用過一次㗎。 (K. W. Leung 2010, p.35)

A: Ngo teng-gwo nei jung-gwo jatci wo3.

1SG hear-EXP you use-EXP once SFP

‘I heard you using (it) once...’

b. which is 有可能嘅。

B: [which is mou honang ge3].

WHICH IS not possible SFP

‘which is impossible.’

- As such, *which*-clauses introduce a propositional meaning distinct from the matrix clause, rather than contribute to modification (**LeeTMM:2025**).

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Semantic properties

- The propositional meaning brought along with the *which*-constructions is conventionally triggered.
- Moreover,
 - ① it is projective
 - ② it is illocutionary independent
 - ③ it is obligatorily discourse-new (not presupposition)
 - ④ it disallows any binding relations from the matrix clause

① Projective

- The content in *which*-constructions. escape the scope of different operators.
- E.g., It projects from conditional clauses.

(9) 如果Allen有十個子女(which 他沒有)...

[M], Blog

Ruguo Allen you shi ge zinu [which ta meiyou], name
if Allen have 10 CL children (WHICH he not.have), then
'If Allen had 10 children (he didn't), then '

- The *which*-construction contradicts the antecedent clause, but it does not give rise to infelicity.

① Projective

- When embedded under intensional contexts with an epistemic agent, the content are still **oriented to the speaker**, but not the matrix subject.

(10) 阿明擔心 Peter 做咗會長，which 佢唔會選到，
會令個組織冇晒支持者。

Aaming daamsam Peter zou-zo wuizoeng, [which keoi m-wui
Aaming worry Peter be-PFV president WHICH 3SG not-will
syun-dou], wui ling go zouzik mou-saa zicize
elect-able will make CL group lose-all supporter

(Lit.) 'Aaming worries that Peter serving as the president, which he will not be elected, will make the group lose all its supporters.'

- It still indicates that the speaker thinks that Peter won't be elected as chairperson.
- The *which*-RC is interpreted beyond the scope of *daamsam* 'worry'.

② Illocutionary independent

- *Which*-constructions can occur after SFPs, and contain a different SFP.

(11) 你啲手勢唔乾淨㗎 which 你自己已經承認咗啦 [C], Forum

Nei di sausai m-gongzeng wo3 [which nei zigei jiging
 You CL skill not-clean SFP WHICH you self already
 singjing-zo laa1].
 admit-PFV SFP

(Lit.) 'Your skills are not good enough. Which you also admitted already.'

② Illocutionary independent

- Matrix = interrogative
which-constructions = declarative

(12) 是不是要先有一個心智圖 (which我從來沒畫過) [M], Social media
 shi-shi-shi yao xian you yi-ge xinzhitu (which wo cong lai mei
 be-not-be need first have one mind.map WHICH I never
 hua-gwo)?
 draw-EXP
 (Lit.) 'Do (we) need a mind map first, which I have never drawn?

- Which*-constructions are thus be illocutionarily independent from the matrix clause.

③ Discourse-new

- Unlike presupposition, *which*-constructions introduce discourse-new information, and obey a triviality condition.
- **Presupposition** allows the presupposed to be discourse-old/ trivially true.

(13) [Context: *The speaker said that Mr. Wong is a linguist.*]

而同學都知道王老師係一個語言學者。

Ji tunghok dou zidou Wong Lousi hai jat-go jyujinhokze.

and student all know Mr. Wong be one-CL linguist

‘And all students know that Mr. Wong is a linguist.’

- Although the presupposition is trivially true in (a), it is felicitous.

③ Discourse-new

- However, when the content in **which-constructions** is trivially true in, it results in infelicity/redundancy.

(14) [Context: The speaker said that Mr. Wong is a linguist.]

當記者訪問王老師，which 係一個語言學家，
記者嘅態度好友善。

Dong geize fongman Wong Lousi, [which hai jat-go
when repoerter interview Mr. Wong WHICH be one-cl
jyujinhokge], geize ge taidou hou jausin.
linguist reporter GE attitude very friendly

(Lit.) 'When the reporter interviewed Mr. Wong, which is a linguist, the attitude of the reporter is pretty firendly.'

③ Discourse-new

- One more difference with presupposition: the projection of presupposed content can be blocked if it is entailed by the conditional antecedent (**Koev:2022**).

- (15) a. Hillary regrets she kissed Obama.
 (presupposed: Hillary kissed Obama)
- b. If Hillary kissed Obama, then she regrets she kissed him.
 (Not presupposed: Hillary kissed Obama)

- The content in *which*-constructions remain strongly projective despite the presence of an entailing conditional antecedent.

(16) a. 阿明想做老師，which 會受人尊敬。

Aaming soeng zou lousi, which wui saujan-zyunging.

Aaming want be teacher WHICH will be-respectable

'Aaming wants to be a teacher, which is respectable.'

b. #如果老師會受人尊敬，阿明想做老師，which 會受人尊敬。

#Jyugwo lousi wui saujan-zyunging, Aaming soeng zou lousi,

if teacher will be-respectable Aaming want be teacher

which wui saujan-zyunging.

WHICH will be-respectable

'If a teacher is respectable, Aaming wants to be a teacher, which is respectable.'

- The speaker is both certain (in parentheticals) and uncertain (in conditionals), hence infelicitous.

④ No binding

- The anaphors in *which*-constructions cannot be bound by an antecedent in the host clause.

(17) *每個學生都跟我打招呼，which 我其實認不出他。

*Meige xuesheng dou gen wo dazhaohu, which wo qishi ren-bu-chu
every student all to me greet WHICH I indeed recognize-not
ta.

3SG

(lit.) 'Every student greeted me, which I didn't really recognize (him).'

(18) *會長多謝所有會員，which 都用自己嘅方法幫咗手。

*Wuizoeng doze soujau wuijyun, which dou jung zigei ge fongfaat
Chairperson thank all member WHICH all use self GE way
bong-zo-sau.
helped

(lit.): The chairperson thanked every members, which contributed in his own way."

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Analysis

The desiderata for *which*-constructions

- Syntactically, they are not relative structures.
 - The *which*-constructions are only discourse-related to the host clause.
 - *which* does not function as a relative pronoun.
- Semantically, the proposition introduced by them
 - ① is projective
 - ② is illocutionary independent
 - ③ is obligatorily discourse-new (not presupposition)
 - ④ disallows any binding relations from the host clause

Analysis

- I propose that *which*-constructions are indeed **clausal parentheticals**.
- *Which* in *which*-constructions
 - lexically borrowed from English
 - semantically bleached, losing anaphoricity
 - used as a **functional morpheme that introduce a Force Phrase** (cf. the illocutionary approach to parentheticality; **Koev:2022**)
- Note that the borrowing involves a particular lexical item, rather than a whole paradigm of relative pronouns in English.
 - *who, *when, *where, etc.

Analysis

- An illustration:

(19) 佢見到部電話 which 佢話想買啲。 (T. C. Leung (2001), p.58)

Keoi gin-dou bou dinwaa [which keoi waa soeng mai] wo5.

3SG see-ASP CL telephone WHICH 3SG say want buy SFP

'He has seen a telephone which he says he wants to buy.'

- The sentence contains two Force Phrases.

(20) [_{ForceP1} Ø_{DECL} [he has seen a telephone]

[_{ForceP2} which_{DECL} [he says he want to buy]]]

Analysis

- The meaning of *which*, as a parenthetical **force operator** (which introduces a propositional referent, restricts its value to the content of its prejacent, and asserts its content.)

$$(21) \quad a. \quad \llbracket \textit{which} \rrbracket = \lambda p. \mathbf{P-DECL}^p_c(p)$$

b. Parenthetical operator (P-DECL)

$$\mathbf{P-DECL}^p_c(\phi) \text{ for } \exists p \wedge \phi_p \wedge c + p$$

($c + p$ commits the speaker of (the referent of) context c to the proposition p)

- It contrast with a root force operator in an at-issue condition.

(22) Root operator (R-DECL)

$$\mathbf{R-DECL}^p_c(\phi) \text{ for } \exists p \wedge \phi_p \wedge c \oplus p$$

Analysis

- Derivation

(23) a. $[_{\text{ForceP1}} \mathbf{R-DECL}^p_c [_{\text{CP}} \text{he}^x \text{saw phone}$
 $[_{\text{ForceP2}} \mathbf{P-DECL}^p_c [_{\text{CP}} \text{he}^x \text{says want buy}]]]]$

b. $\exists p \wedge \text{see}_p(\text{x, phone}) \wedge c \oplus p \wedge$
 $\exists q \wedge \text{say}_q(\text{x, want.buy.phone}) \wedge c + q$

- In the next section, I will discuss some desirable consequences of this analysis.

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Consequence #1: declarative parentheticals

- Given *which* is an overt *declarative* operator, the parenthetical clause is always declarative.
- It is unable to host an interrogative clause.

(24) *個司機，which 佢叫咩名話，突然消失咗。

*Go sigei **which** keoi giu me meng waa2, datyin siusat-zo.
 CL drive WHICH 3SG call what name SFP suddenly disappeared
 (lit.) 'The driver – which what is his name – disappeared suddenly.'

Consequence #1: declarative parentheticals

- Different from English clausal parentheticals, which can be interrogative.

(25) The driver – what was his name again? – had disappeared.

(p.c. Daniel Plesniak)

- Note also that replacing *which* with a pause improves the sentence.

(26) 個司機，Ø 佢叫咩名話，突然消失咗。

Go sigei, [Ø keoi giu me meng waa2], datyin siusat-zo.

CL drive 3SG call what name SFP suddenly disappeared

(lit.) ‘The driver – what is his name – disappeared suddenly.’

Consequence #2: non-obligatory at-issueness

- The semantics of *which* has left at-issueness open.
- While clausal parentheticals are typically not-at-issue, it is not a must.
- ① Clausal parentheticals can be denied.

(27) 全場得一張枱係二人枱，*which* 佢地仲食緊主菜。

A: Cyun-coeng dak jat-zoeng toi hai ji-jan-toi, [*which*
 whole-venue only one-CL table be two-person-table WHICH
 keoidei zung sik-gan zyucoi.
 they still eating main.course

(Lit.) A: 'There is only one table for two people in the venue, *which* they are still having the main course.'

(28) Felicitous continuations

- a. B: No, they are having deserts. denying the parentheeticals
- b. B: No, there are two such tables. denying the root clause

Consequence #2: non-obligatory at-issueness

- ② Clausal parentheticals can also serve as an answer.

(29) *[In response to the question “Why don’t you say a word?”]*

件事好複雜，which 我有咩精力去講。

gin si houfukzap, which ngo mou me zingsan heoi

CL matter complicated WHICH I not.have any energy to

gong.

talk.about

‘The matter is complicated, and I don’t have any energy to talk about it.’

- Clausal parentheticals are open for at-issueness.
- It is root clauses that must be at-issue.

Consequence #3: the size of the parenthetical clause

- Given that *which* introduces a Force Phrase, it is predicted that the proposition can accomodate various CP-level elements.

① Focus projection

- (30) 下一步就係買彈床，which 連彈床都有review Social media
 Haa jat-bou zauhai maai daancong, [which [FocusP
 Next one-step be buy jumping.bed WHICH
lin daancong dou jau review]] .
 even jumping.bed also have review
 (Lit.) 'The next step is to buy jumping bed, which even jimping bed has reviews.'

Consequence #3: the size of the parenthetical clause

- ② **Speaker-oriented adverbs**, presumably in the EvalP, can appear within *which*-constructions as well.

(31) 啲男人超high 超大動作地fing手 (which好在佢無攞住penlight)

Social media

Di namjan ciudaai dungzok fing sau, [which [EvalP houzoi
CL.PL man great.extent motion wave hand WHICH luckily
keoidei mou lo-zyu penlight]] .
they not.have holding penlight

(Lit.) 'The men are waving their hands at full, which luckily they are not holding any penlight.'

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Concluding remarks

- I proposed to analyze *which*-constructions as clausal parentheticals.
- The illocutionary approach to parentheticality (**Koev:2022**) accurately captures the syntactic and semantics properties of the constructions.
- There is no need to invoke the two-dimensional approach (Potts 2005), which in turn lends support to a unidimensional semantics (Schlenker 2013, 2023).

Concluding remarks

Other implications

- On *parentheticals*. Parentheticality in Chinese can be grammaticality marked, thanks to lexical borrowing from English.
- On *code-mixing*. There is no syntactic borrowing at all. The relative pronoun *which* is lexically borrowed as a functional morpheme that introduce predication (pace K. W. Leung 2010; Chan 2022).
- Link to slides: www.tinyurl.com/Lee-which

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