

# An emerging type of relative clauses in Cantonese

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# Table of Contents

## 1 Introduction

## 2 Internal syntax

## 3 External syntax

## 4 A sketch of an analysis

## 5 Future research

# 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. 細路返工就有 滿足感 (which 佢地返學一直得唔到  $\Delta$  )
  - b. 佢之後收到 第一封信 , which  $\Delta$  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  $\Delta$  )
- The signature property of this type of RCs is the lexical borrowing of the English relative pronoun *which*.
  - I call this emerging type of RCs ***which*-RCs**.

# Introduction

- *Which*-RCs do not exclusively appear in written forms.
  - Taken from an interview transcript in this [2015 HKU BA thesis](#):
- (3) a. 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
- b. 通識有個唔同嘅位就係通識比較可能講多啲即係 current  
affairs 啦, 甚至乎可能係譬如一啲 socio-political 嘅  
issues, in which 學生佢嚟其他科 ... 比較少 concern  
係一啲即係比較貼近學生嘅社會時事果方面嘅 values 囉
- Caveat: most reported instances of *which*-RCs today are taken from the internet of different sources, including forums, social network services, blogs, etc.

# Introduction

- This study represents the first attempt in describing an emerging type of relative clauses in Cantonese
- ... with the hope of informing the study of RCs, as well as code-switching.
- Drawing on data from internet resources, I discuss both the internal and external syntax of this type of RC.
- I reveal that *which*-RC are not only widespread, but also displays properties not shared to RCs in Cantonese and English.
- A caveat: Instead of proposing a detailed syntactic analysis on *which*-RCs, this talk at best discusses some syntactic issues associated with *which*-RCs.

# Table of Contents

① Introduction

② Internal syntax

③ External syntax

④ A sketch of an analysis

⑤ Future research

## Internal syntax ① gap(-less)

- *Which*-RCs with a gap

- (4) a. 自由選擇配料我地揀左 芝士、蘑菇同燒雞肉 which  $\Delta$   
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  $\Delta$  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 clauses
- d. 例如 覺得當日個樣唔好睇,張相唔好睇 (which好多人都會  $\Delta$ )  
VP clauses
- e. 雖然 我份人比較直接 (which佢地唔鐘意) TP/CP clauses



## Internal syntax ① gap(-less)

- A note on clausal relativization:
- Cantonese RCs do not target clauses, probably due 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. I usually *smoke indoors*, which the governor is going to ban next month. (p.c. Adam Woodnutt)

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

## Internal syntax ① gap(-less)

- 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. 其實嗌交點解會傷感情，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.
- e. 叫我地睇 album, which 個album 只有1x幾相      copies
- f. 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      copies

- Note that the resumption options go beyond pronouns.

## Internal syntax ① gap(-less)

- This is reminiscent of a property of non-restrictive clauses in English, where appositive relatives can contain CP-internal heads (Fabb 1990; Citko 2008).
- (8) a. The LAGB, which organization meets tomorrow, is based here.  
 b. \*The LAGB which organization meets tomorrow is based here.
- (9) Oxygen and fire are related, which fact I long ago pointed out.

## Internal syntax ① gap(-less)

- *Which*-RCs without a gap - genuinely “gap-less” type

### (10) Semantic association

- 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
- 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

### (11) Parenteticals

- 佢有時係唔係好識處理呢啲事 which 佢會幾蝕底
  - 我手上的是比較適合油性肌膚，which 我都算是個油面人
- These types of *which*-RCs is fairly common.
  - But they are not found in canonical RCs in Cantonese and English.

## Internal syntax - ② relative pronouns

- The choice of relative pronouns is almost fixed - either *which* or *in which*

- (12) 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 allowed in *which*-RCs. Consider:

- (13) 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

- The form *in which* seems to be conventionalized in *which*-RCs.

## Internal syntax - ② relative pronouns

- On a related note, some forms appear to be conventionalized as well.

- (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

## Internal syntax - ② relative pronouns

- No relative pronoun other than *which* is allowed.

- (16)
- \*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* (at least to my ears).
- The borrowing of *which* from English is a signature property of *which*-RCs.

# Table of Contents

① Introduction

② Internal syntax

③ **External syntax**

④ A sketch of an analysis

⑤ Future research



## External syntax

- While most *which*-RCs appear sentence-finally, there are sentence-medial cases.

- (17) a. 就算真係個pateint錯帶漏野 (in which你唔係  $\Delta$ ) ,  
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

- Note that the sentences are degraded without (*in*) *which*

## External syntax

- The relative clauses can occur at a distance from the head noun they modify.

(18) 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

- More interesting, they can even occur after sentence-final particles:

(19) 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

- Note also that the relative clauses can also carry SFPs.

## External syntax

- Note that fronting of relative clauses is disallowed.

- (20) a. \*which 你自己已經承認咗  $\Delta$  啦 我係話 你啲手勢唔乾淨 嗶
- b. \*但 which is 係我好欣賞  $\Delta$  既, 佢真係好重視佢既事業 囉

- In this regard, the left-right asymmetry is similar to relative clauses in English, which are reported to allow postposing, but not fronting.

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

- Which*-RCs share syntactic similarities with appositive clauses in English.

## External syntax

- Consider also Japanese, taken from Abe (2019), where the RCs are argued to be late adjoined to the null head noun that is right-dislocated.

- (22) a. John-ga kinoo  $\Delta$  syoozyo-ni atta yo, [<sub>RC</sub> **siroi boosi-o kabutteiru**].  
 John-NOM yesterday girl-DAT saw SFP white hat-ACC  
 is.wearing  
 'John saw a girl yesterday, who was wearing a white hat.'
- b. \*John-ga [<sub>RC</sub> siroi boosi-o kabutteiru] kinoo  $\Delta$   
 John-NOM white hat-ACC is.wearing yesterday  
 syoozyo-ni atta yo.  
 girl-DAT saw

- Given the productivity of Cantonese right dislocation, this option is not implausible. But the appearance of SFPs remains puzzling.

# Table of Contents

- ① Introduction
- ② Internal syntax
- ③ External syntax
- ④ A sketch of an analysis**
- ⑤ Future research

## A sketch of an analysis

- In terms of discourse functions, *which*-RCs are similar to nonrestrictive, appositive clauses.
- In terms of syntactic forms, they adopt relative pronouns, but the grammatical function of *which* is bleached, which is almost a pure formal marker of modification or additional, supplement information
- In terms of distribution, *which*-RCs are relatively unrestricted in the right periphery.
- To probe the syntactic derivation of *which*-RCs, it is important to look at different syntactic dependencies of the construction.

## Between the head nouns and the relative clauses

- Long distance dependencies

- (23) 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 ]

- Island insensitivity

- (24) 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 ]
- (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 ] )

## Between the head nouns and the relative clauses

- The associating elements cannot be reconstructed in the *which*-RCs

(26) a. 班長一次過多謝晒 [ Δ 放低咗 自己 買黎嘅禮物嘅 ]  
 全部同學

b. \*班長一次過多謝晒 全部同學 ,  
 [ which Δ (都) 放低咗 自己 買黎嘅禮物 ]

c. 班長一次過多謝晒 全部同學 ,  
 [ which 佢地都放低咗 自己 買黎嘅禮物 ]

- Base generation of the head noun?



## The syntactic position of the relative clauses

- The relative clauses can be associated with a head noun within a syntactic island.

### (27) Complex NP islands and adjunct islands

- 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

- (28) 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

- Base generation of the relative clauses?
- → *which*-RCs as parentheticals? *which* as a parenthetical marker?

## The syntactic position of the relative clauses

- I shall note that the relative clauses containing a bound pronoun can be put back to a lower position near their associating elements.

- (29) a. 我叫 每個人 都帶 [ 一樣 佢 拿手嘅野食 ] 黎
- b. 我叫 每個人 都帶 一樣野食 黎，which  $\Delta$  要係 佢 拿手嘅
- c. 我叫 每個人 都帶 一樣野食 黎，which 啲材料要係 佢 準備嘅

- It seems that SFPs do not block this “putting back”

- (30) 我叫 每個人 都帶 一樣野食 黎 囉，which  $\Delta$  要係 佢 拿手嘅

- Note that this kind of pronominal binding does not require strict locality.

- (31) 我叫 每個人 都帶 一樣野食 黎 囉，而呢樣野要係 佢 拿手嘅

# Table of Contents

① Introduction

② Internal syntax

③ External syntax

④ A sketch of an analysis

**⑤ Future research**

## Future research

- Spoken data
  - my impression is that *which*-RCs are quite common among university students
- Speakers' variations
  - I myself is a speaker of *which*-RCs, but not everyone I know is.
- *Which*-RCs are also common in Mandarin colloquial writings:

- (32)
- a. 你看起來就是那種男朋友長相，*which* 你根本不是，你這個Monster
  - b. 先是吃着西瓜葡萄圣女果看了《Luca》，*which*我三刷
  - c. 這次主題是【愛用文具】，*which*我可以聊三天三夜
  - d. 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
  - e. 昨晚我讀完了*which*那位女士非常生氣
  - f. 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
  - g. 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
  - h. 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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