

Exploring the Role of Utterance-Final Particle *lō* in Turn Allocation in Cantonese Conversation

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Inherent in Cantonese grammar, utterance-final particles are used in naturally occurring Cantonese conversations to aid speakers to perform speech acts, indicate the source of knowledge, as well as communicate emotions. While studied extensively in semantics, pragmatics, and syntax, research on these significant elements in Cantonese as conversation objects from a conversation analytic point of view is either scarce or under-represented. With an aim to fill this lacuna, this paper investigates the role and behavior of the utterance-final particle *lō* (囉) in turn construction and allocation using excerpts from a 42-minute telephone conversation. It is found that while an unstretched *lō* typically proposes turn completion and unfolds a CTRP, the particle is stretched strategically in naturally occurring conversations to signal and practice turn continuation. It is also argued that the turn-holding device is conceptually ingrained in native speakers' conversational knowledge.

1. Background


Inherent in Cantonese grammar, utterance-final particles are pervasive in naturally occurring Cantonese conversations. These particles are a group of morphemes suffixed to most utterances to aid speakers to perform speech acts, indicate the source of knowledge, and/or communicate emotions (Matthews & Yip, 2011). Pragmatic meaning typically expressed in intonation in European languages is conveyed via particles in Cantonese (Chan, 1999; Wakefield, 2011), hence its ubiquity in conversations. Moreover, Luke (1990) reveals in an informal count that “an utterance particle is found in continuous talk [...] every 1.5 seconds” (p.11). Furthermore, researchers in modern days have discovered a tendency for Cantonese speakers to use these particles in online written communication even when typing in English, suggesting the importance of this group of untranslatable morphemes in Cantonese conversation (James, 2001; Sewell & Chan, 2016).

Studied extensively from various perspectives: from semantics (Kwok, 1984; Wakefield, 2011), to pragmatics and speech acts (Gibbons, 1980), to syntax (Fung, 2000; Matthews & Yip, 2011; Sybesma & Li, 2007), the functions of these particles remain elusive. While a conversation analytic (CA) approach was pioneered by Luke (1990) to examine these particles, much of his analysis (and what follows in CA in present days, if any) centers on the sequential contexts in which these particles appear, as well as their

relation to topic management. Research on their roles in turn management is surprisingly scarce, in spite of its importance in verbal communication. This paper, with a focus on one of the most frequently used utterance-final particles *lō*, aims to fill this research lacuna by closely scrutinizing it as a conversational object pertinent to turn construction. It hopes to complement what has been found in the existing literature in order to provide a more complete picture of how *lō* is manipulated to contribute to turn design.

It should also be noted that in this paper, the term “utterance-final particle” is used in lieu of “sentence-final particle” (as in other research) because spoken discourse, rather than written one, is investigated. By nature, speech comprises fragments to which these particles are adhered in the final syntactic position. Therefore, it is more appropriate to refer to them as “utterance-final particles” for the purpose of this paper.

2. Literature Review

The utterance particle investigated in the present study is , represented as *lō* (an abbreviation for a high-level tone /lo55/). It must be distinguished from the *lō* of a mid or low-level tone since the pragmatic functions they serve are entirely different and should be regarded as separate utterance particles. The versatility of the particle makes it infeasible in this paper to consider every possible syntactic position in which it may appear and the corresponding functions. Furthermore, given the purpose of this study, only its occurrence in the utterance-final position is considered.

Utterance-final particles are traditionally considered empty, which entails that “they do not have readily specifiable truth-conditional meanings” (Luke, 1990:4). However, other researchers have argued that particles encode certain meaning, especially one that colors the emotion of the speaker, reflects his stance, and expresses certainty (e.g. Leung, 2012; Wakefield, 2011; Ye, 2004), suggesting their identity as “emotional adverbs”. The particle under investigation, *lō*, must be attached to an utterance to exhibit its meaning, which is highly context-dependent, particularly when it appears in the utterance-final position. It is thus treated as semantically-free in this research.

Despite the lack of content meaning, the pragmatic functions adhered to *lō* has been rather thoroughly examined. Zhang and Ni (1999) illustrate the evidentiality connoted in the particle, implying that the speaker believes the message conveyed in the TCU as “simple, truthful, easily comprehensible and conclusive” (p.200; my translation). Fang (2003) adds that the particle can be used to “explain, agree or ascertain facts” (p.134; my translation). On the same note, Leung (2005) points out that the employment of *lō* indicates the speaker’s certainty about the message. It is complemented by Tang’s finding (2008), which delineates the sense of “naturally” and “of course” – self-evidentiality – carried by the particle. Moreover, as an attitude and emotion marker, *lō* denotes sarcasm and/or annoyance (Li, 1995), as well as certainty, frustration and dismay (Gao, 1980). Summarizing the previous findings, Matthews and Yip (2011) conclude that *lō* serves to:

(i) exhibit evidentiality

你 唔 理 佢 咪 得 囉
 nei mh lei koei mai dak lo
 you NEG care him PT okay PT
Just ignore him then it'll be OK!

(ii) enhance affective and emotion coloring (e.g. express annoyance)

啲 車 行 得 勁 快 囉
 dee ce haang dak ging fai lo
 those car move ASP super fast PT
Those cars are moving so fast!

(iii) invite agreement, cooperation and/or sympathy

唉 我 唔 知 點 算 好 囉
 aai ngo mh ji dim suen ho lo
 sigh I NEG know how deal good PT
Sigh. I don't know what to do.

As for being a conversational object, the utterance-final *lō* is used as a device for completion proposal and topic closure, in a number of sequences including question-answer, reporting, settlement negotiation, and confirmation (Luke, 1990). While suggesting that *lō* marks a topic boundary, Luke (ibid) points out that the possibility of completion and ending that *lō* induces often orients to the “[passing of] responsibility on to the other participant(s) to take the conversation in some as yet underdetermined direction” (p.188). In CA terms, *lō* inherently marks the Possible Completion Point (PCP) of a TCU because syntactically it can be suffixed to a word, a phrase, a clause or a sentence, indicating a syntactic completion. By nature, each Cantonese character embodies a phonemic pitch (tone). Prosodic completion is thus automatically marked by an utterance-final particle, which also carries a pragmatic function, as discussed. In simpler terms, *lō* carries the structural function of unfolding a CTRP in Cantonese conversation, where syntactic, prosodic and pragmatic completions converge and a transition of turn to another speaker is highly expected (Ford and Thompson, 1996).

As speaker transition becomes relevant, the priority in applying turn allocation techniques follows in succession (Sack, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974):

- (a) Current [speaker] selects next;
- (b) If not (a), next speaker self-selects;
- (c) If not (b), current speaker continues.

For these reasons, when an utterance-final positioned *lō* is observed, transition of speakers is expected. Yet, topic closure achieved by *lō* may not necessarily trigger turn transition (Luke, 1990) since “this discourse role can be overridden by other indicators of incompleteness of the turn such as ... unfinished meaning” (Leung & Gibbons, 2011). However, the exact mechanism in such cases remains under-explained.

With an aim to address this unanswered question and contribute to the understanding of these essential elements in Cantonese conversation, this study sets out to explore the role of *lō* as a conversational object in relation to turn allocation. Specifically, I argue that stretching of *lō* invariably closes a CTRP and leads to turn continuation, while its unstretched counterpart always unfolds a CTRP and prompts turn transition. In other words, stretched *lō* is a turn-holding device in Cantonese conversation.

3. Data and Method

The naturally occurring data examined in the present study comes from a 42-minute audio-recorded telephone conversation in Cantonese between two confidants, J and S. Both interlocutors were born and raised, and have spent a significant amount of time in Hong Kong, hence the representativeness of the Hong Kong Cantonese speech style. In the conversation, a range of topics are covered, which orient to the daily life events of the participants.

The entire conversation is transcribed¹ iteratively by the researcher to enhance the intra-rater reliability. Upon identification of the candidate turn-holding device, the situational and sequential contexts in which it appears are coded and categorized as exemplified:

(Extract 0: Recount a conversation: 08:15-20)

- 01 J: → 咪講番嗰日囉::.
 mai gong faan gor jat lo::.
 PT say ASP that day PT
So we talked about that day again.
- 02 咪講番嗰日(.)跟住又拗咗陣.
 mai goong faan gor jat (.) gan zyu jau aau zo zan.
 PT say ASP that day then again argue ASP PT
So we talked about that day, then we argued a little.
- 03 S: 哦: OK: 算啦.
 ngo: OK: syun laa.
 EXCL forget PT
I see. Forget it.

Table 1: Codes

Stretched?	Turn allocation	Communication breakdown?	Remarks
YES	Turn held; current speaker continues	NO	As expected

¹ See Appendix for transcription key. The second row of each line comprises transcription to *Jyutping* (粵拼), a Romanization system for Cantonese developed by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

The patterns of turn allocation are then analyzed within a conversation analytic framework in relation to other conversational objects and practices in the sequence. Instances of the use of the candidate device are discussed and delineated in six selected extracts.

4. Analysis

As discussed in the literature review, a typical function of the Cantonese utterance-final particle *lō* is to negotiate endings, declare evidentiality, and invite agreement and sympathy (Matthews and Yip, 2011). The following excerpt displays how a regular *lō* without stretching indicates the end of a TCU and opens up a CTRP, which renders a regular turn allocation priority (Sacks et al., 1974). Leading up to the excerpt, the participants discuss the items to pack when they go camping.

(Excerpt 1: Packing: 38:18-32)

- 01 S: 其實真正要擺落去嘅
 kei sat zan zing jiu baai lok-heoi ge
 actually truly need put ASP PT
 Actually what needs to be put in there
- 02 其實真係得衫: 㗎啫 㗎:
 kei sat zan hai dak saam: ga ze wo:
 actually really only clothes PT PT PT
 is just clothes.
- 03 J: → (0.1) 係喇(.) 沖涼嘢: 囉.
 (0.1) hai le (.) cung loeng je: lo.
 yes PT shower stuff PT
 Yeah. And toiletries.
- 04 S: 沖涼嘢咁你share㗎嘛: >都係<一份: 啫:
 cung loeng je gum nei ga ma: >dou hai<jat fen: je:
 shower stuff PT you PT PT also be one CL PT
 But you share the toiletries, and it's just one set of them.
- 05 J: → 係囉.
 hai lo.
 yes PT
 Yeah.
- 06 S: 係呀.
 hai aa.
 yes PT
 Yeah.

A simple turn sequence of suggestion and agreement is observed. Lines 01-02 form the first pair part (FPP) of the base adjacency pair when S suggests packing only clothes, and J's agreement turn at line 03 completes the sequence. When he further proposes to bring toiletries (*cung loeng je: lō*) at line 03, he suffixes the utterance with an

unstretched *lō* to signify evidentiality as well as invite agreement. At the same time, a CTRP is exposed. S as the next speaker self-selects to pick up the turn (Sacks et al., 1974) and supply an insert expansion at line 04 in order to clarify that only one set of toiletries is needed. At line 05, J supplies the second pair part with (“*hai lo.*” // “*Yeah*”). Serving identical pragmatic functions, the unstretch *lō* (line 05) reveals a CTRP where S, as the next speaker, fulfills the turn transition expectation and completes the sequence with a sequence closing third (“*hai aa*”). These two instances shed light on the pragmatic role of *lō* in terms of completion proposal.

To further substantiate the claim that an unstretched *lō* is perceived in Cantonese to signal pre-closing, the use of an unstretched *lō* in Excerpt 2 below is analyzed, which consists of J’s recount of an argument with his materialistic ex-boyfriend.

(Excerpt 2: Designer brand: 05:35-05:44)

- 01 S: .hh 即係其實佢覺得你同佢一樣
 .hh zik hai kei sat keoi gok dak nei tung keoi jat joeng
 so be actually he feels you and him one type
That means he feels you and him are the same kind of people
- 02 → 都咁鍾意啲啲-brands囉.
 dou gum zoeng yi goh dee- lo.
 also as like that CL PT
and you like those designer brands as much as he.
- 03 (0.8)
- 04 S: 個心裡.hh
 gor sum loei.hh
 CL heart inside
Inside you.
- 05 J: .hh hh 我唔知::呀.hh=
 .hh hh ngo mh zi:: a. hh=
 I NEG know PT
I don’t know.
- ((J then went on to initiate a new topic))

As seen in the excerpt, a turn sequence is constructed when S makes an assessment about the recount and J in turn neither agrees nor disagrees with the assessment, expressing frustration in his tone. At lines 01-02, S constructs a multi-unit turn by a mid-TCU device. She finishes her first TCU in line 01 (i.e. concluding that the ex-boyfriend feels J and himself are the same), and employs a prospective indexical (i.e., “yat joeng”, *the same*) (Goodwin, 1996) that points forward to the next TCU in line 02, when she explains how J and the ex-boyfriend might be the same. Upon the completion, the unstretched *lō* serves the said pragmatic function, exposing a CTRP. A speaker transition becomes relevant, when J as the next speaker is expected to self-select and pick up the turn (Sacks et al., 1974). A gap (line 03) immediately follows the unstretched *lō*-

- 08 S: → [↑真 ↑係 想 CRY 囉:: 突然- 因為 其實 好 衰=]
 [↑zan ↑hai soeng lo:: dat jin- jan wai kei sat hou sei=]
 really want PT suddenly because actually very bad
I really want to cry. Suddenly. It's because it's actually very bad.
- 09 =我 z- 知道 我呢 一 張 咭
 =ngo z- zi dou ngo ni jat zoeng kaat
 I kn- know I this one CL card
I know that this credit card of mine
- 10 次 次 都 月 頭 .hh 我- 應 該 suppose 去 韓 國 前 就
 ci ci dou jyut tau .hh ngo- jing goi heoi hon gwok cin zau
 time time also month head I should go Korea before ASP
every time at the beginning of the month, I'm supposed to, before going to Korea,
- 11 要 找 咗 佢 °呀°=因為- 我 去 完 韓 國 番 嚟
 jiu zaau zo keoi °a°= jan wai- ngo heoi jyun hon gwok faan lai
 need settle ASP it PT because- I go ASP Korea back ASP
I need to settle it because after I've come back from Korea
- 12 其 實 我 成 個 人 .hh 都- 都 lo:st 晒 啦 =>我 根 本 就 唔-<
 kei sat ngo saang gor jan .hh dou- dou sai la=>ngo gan bun zau mh-<
 actually I entire CL person also also ADV PT I at all ASP NEG
my entire mind is lost. I can't...
- 13 → > 根 本 就< 完: 全 無 記 得 呢 件 事 囉::=
 >gan bun zau< jyun: cyun mou gei dak ni gin si lo::=
 at all ASP totally NEG remember this CL event PT
I can't remember this at all.
- 14 =唉. 唔 開 心 呀.
 =aai. mh hoi sam a.
 EXCLM NEG happy PT
Sigh. That's so sad.

S's explicit news announcement about forgetting to settle her credit card at line 01 is responded by J's explicit acknowledgement "I know", which prompts S to blatantly express her feeling "Very unhappy", yet it is cut off because the utterance overlaps with J's request to elaborate on the event, "And then?" (line 02). The request is immediately followed by S's utterance "I'll settle it" (line 03). *lō* is employed to suffix the TCU in order to invite sympathy from J because the implicature is that she has to pay a penalty fee for missing the deadline. *lō* alone without stretching would indicate the end of the TCU and open up a CTRP for the transition of turn to the next speaker. However, S stretches it in order to extend her turn, which allows her to explain how long the deadline has passed and to reiterate her sadness (line 05) in order to maximize the sympathy that she can arouse from J. The implicature is understood by J, who thus responds humorously with another implicature about calling the bank and asking for an extension of deadline

without any penalty². Moreover, the use of humor with laughter as support is evidence that S's deliberate attempt to trigger sympathy was successful since it is a typical practice to soothe negative emotions (Hay, 2001).

Lines 08-14 represent an extended turn which S stretches *lō* twice (lines 08 and 13) to construct and hold, so as to perform the same pragmatic functions as what she does at lines 03-04, i.e., to express frustration and heighten sympathy, hereby through justification for her forgetfulness. S starts off the turn with an emotion trigger, claiming that she wants to cry (with an emphasis on “*really*” by a pitch rise, and “*cry*” with heavier stress), as a direct declaration of her feeling. The TCU carries the emotion of frustration as indicated by the utterance-final particle *lō*. To eliminate the conversation-terminating function of the particle, S stretches it to signal turn continuation in order for her to preserve her turn and provide more justification about her absent-mindedness in a multi-unit turn (lines 08-13), when she explains that she was too exhausted to remember to settle the credit card balance after her business trip in Korea. Note that within the turn, she uses other turn-holding devices including latching (lines 11 and 12), a compound TCU (lines 12-13 “*because...can't remember it at all*”)³, and quick start/ rush through (line 12)⁴ (Wong and Waring, 2010). At the end of the final component of the compound TCU (line 13), she uses *lō* to, again, invite agreement and sympathy. For the same reason as the previous two instances in this excerpt, she stretches *lō*, alongside latching, to avoid giving up the turn in the CTRP so that she can reiterate conspicuously her feeling (*very unhappy*) at line 14 in order to maximize the potential sympathy from J.

The analysis of this excerpt demonstrates the how the utterance-final particle *lō* can be stretched in order for the current speaker to fill the CTRP for the construction of multiple TCUs at the speaker's discretion – in this case, to elaborate on a topic and strengthen the affective coloring. Additionally, it can be used with other turn-holding devices to fashion a multi-unit turn.

Excerpt 4 here adequately demonstrates in two instances how the stretching of *lō* is used to hold a turn even when the speaker is not necessarily ready for it. It is most evident because throughout the exchange, J persistently fights for a turn to talk while S attempts to build an extensive turn. To safeguard her turn, S stretches *lō* on two

² As explained by the participants: because of a prior incident that the participants want to keep confidential, they now find calling the bank and asking for a deadline extension for card balance settlement humorous, and it is elicited by the word “chance”.

³ The compound TCU is considered a turn-holding practice because in the given context, a CTRP opens up at 呀 (“*a*”, *PT*) (line 11). Adding the because-subordinate clause (the preliminary component of a compound TCU) makes the TCU incomplete, and the speaker can retain the turn so as to finish the TCU with a final component.

⁴ These practices are not the focus of the paper and thus are not delineated. Note that the rush-through at 12 should be distinguished from the one at line 13 although they comprise the same words, since the latter (the repetition) should just be regarded as a self-initiated self-repair, while the former is a TCU-end turn-holding device (Schegloff, 1996).

occasions. Prior to what is illustrated in the excerpt, the co-participants complain about the incessant request from J's ex-boyfriend for a video call while neither J nor S is ready for it. They feel video-calling someone for no specific reason is absurd.

(Excerpt 4: Video call: 02:37-03:02)

01 S: → 我其實從來未試過 request 人地同我 video call 囉::
 ngo kei sat cung loi mei si gwo jan dei tung ngo lo::
 I actually ever yet try ASP person PL with me PT
I've actually never requested anyone to do a video call with me.

02 J: hh 我 都 <係:: °呀° >.
 hh ngo dou <h[ai:: °a° >.
 I also be PT
I am the same.

03 S: >[除非有]<特別->即係<譬如你話
 >[tsui fei yao]<dak bit->zik hai<pei jyu nei waa
 unless have special so be like you say
Unless there's something special, that is, like, say,

04 你去左旅[行::]咁樣: [你想]show吓啲-環境=
 nei heoi zo lei [hang::] gum joeng: [nei soeng] haa dee- waan ging=
 you go ASP travel like kind you want ASP those surroundings
like you've gone traveling and you want to show a bit of the surroundings

05 J: [hh] [hhhhh]

06 S: → =或者各樣嘢比我[睇囉::],
 =waak ze gok joeng ye bei ngo [taai lo::],
 or each kind thing for me see PT
or for me to see different kinds of things.

07 J: [hhhhh]

08 S: → 如果唔係-真係唔知-
 jyu gwo mh hai- zan hai mh zi-
 if NEG be real be NEG know
If not, I really don't know

09 J: >但係-我-<
 >daan hai- ngo-<
 but be I
But I

10 S: → [個樣又咪係咁::].
 [go joeng jau mai hai gum::].
 CL face again ASP be this
The face is always the same.

11 J: [°h h h h h° h h h h h h h] 咪(h) 係(h)::
 [°h h h h h° h h h h h h h] mai (h) hai (h)::
 ASP be
Exactly

((J goes on to elaborate on his argument with his J))

At line 01, S constructs a TCU and claims that she has never asked anyone to engage in a video call. At the end of the line, a CTRP is created with the utterance-final particle *lō*, showing the speaker's annoyance and declaring evidentiality of the utterance. Note that S stretches *lō* here in an attempt to construct a multi-unit turn. Her intention is further evidenced by her quickened, overlapped start at line 03. However, J unexpectedly inserted a short comment at line 02 (*hh ngo dou <h[ai::^oa^o J]>. // "I am the same."*). S notices J's desire to fight for a turn. Therefore, when J stretches "*hai::*" in "*hai:: a*" (line 02) as an emphatic device, S exploits it as a hint for a PCP. In order to save her own multi-unit turn, S adopts a transitional overlap (Jefferson, 1983) with her quickened utterance "*unless*" at line 03 before a TRP is even exposed so as to reclaim her turn before J goes further. This sequence is the first instance in the excerpt to illustrate that the stretching of *lō* is meant to be a turn-holding device.

Upon successful reclamation of the turn at line 03, S continues until line 10 to elaborate on the topic so as to substantiate her argument that video calling someone for no reasons is unnecessary. Be aware that J's laughter at line 05 is a minimal response token, which does not interrupt nor disturb S's continuous turn at lines 03, 04 and 06. At line 03, the conditional conjunction "*tsui fei*" ("*unless*") hints that S is ready to establish a sentential (compound) TCU, whose preliminary component occurs at lines 03-06. Knowing that she needs a longer turn to encompass the final component, she adopts a stretched *lō*. Recognizing his co-participant's effort, J only supplies a response token again (the laughter) at line 07 without picking up the turn in order to give space for S to fill the final component: the "*if not*" clause (lines 08-10, with line 09 being an unsuccessful attempt by J to interrupt; explained below). What also contributes to the smoothness of this extended turn is the speakers' implicit knowledge about Cantonese subordinate clauses, where parataxis of double conjunctions are frequently used. S's utterance at lines 03-06 ("*Unless... things to see*") carries the projectability of an upcoming clause that begins with "*if not*". The turn-holding device prompts J to refrain from breaking the seamless, extended turn. An important finding here is that this sequence contradicts existing literature's claim about *lō* being a device to "negotiate ending", "propose completion" or hint "topic closure" (Luke, 1990; Matthew and Yip, 2011). S suffixes *lō* to her utterance in order to, on the contrary, hold her turn and stay on the same topic. It shows that stretching of *lō* strips a significant pragmatic function off the utterance particle.

Lines 08-10 reveal an interesting observation about how a stretched *lō* can be employed. S's utterance at line 08 is characterized by abrupt cut-offs, thus semantically obscure. It prompts an other-initiated self-repair practice when J attempts to fight for a turn to continue with the topic with a rush-through at line 09, yet in vain because of S's very rapid self-repair at line 10. J's interruption is extremely short and cut off by S, who entirely ignores it and continues with the talk on the same topic. I thus consider the

interruption insignificant and regard lines 08 and 10 a continuous turn. However, as mentioned, S's own utterance at lines 08-10 is filled with cut-offs as well. It shows that she is in fact not prepared to continue with her turn at line 06, while the fact that she still deliberately stretches *lō* in order to hold the turn means that she regards *lō-stretching* a strategic device for turn-holding. Her successful construction of an extended turn also entails J's recognition of her intention, which is reflected in the adoption of the candidate device.

The previous excerpts have illustrated with examples how the stretched utterance-final particle *lō* serves as an effective turn-holding device to build multi-unit turns so that the speaker's comments or assessments on a particular event can be extended and elaborated. The following excerpt, however, shows how the misuse of the device can cause communication breakdown. The negative example further proves that the stretching of *lō* is perceived (in implicit knowledge) as a turn-holding device in Cantonese.

Excerpt 5 captures the snippet of the co-participants' chat about J's family. Preceding what is shown below, the co-participants discuss the ungenerous spending habits of J's brother, when J expresses dismay toward his brother's manipulation over their parents.

(Excerpt 5: Parents: 21:56-22:26)

01 S: .hh [hhhhhh]

02 J: [阿 媽] 去 澳 洲 > 嗰 陣 時 < 又 係 淨 番 > 嗰 ° 啲 <
 [a maa] heoi ou zau > go zan si < jau hai zing faan > go ° dee <
 PRX mom go Australia that moment again be remain back that CL

When mom was in Australia, I'm sure she left behind for him

03 澳 紙 又 留 番 - 留 - 留 低 晒 比 佢 .
 ou zi jau lau faan- lau- lau dai sai bei keoi.
 Oz dollar again leave back leave leave below all for him
the remaining Oz dollars.

04 S: → .hh 我 唸 > 佢 哋 覺 得 < 有 歉 [意] 囉 ::
 .hh ngo laam > keoi dei gok dak < jau hip [yi] lo ::
 I think he PL feel have sorrow PT
I think they feel sorry.

05 J: [佢 -]
 [keoi -]
 he
He

06 (1.0)

07 J: 佢 哋 一 定 係 唱 多 咗 - 我 阿 媽 佢 -
 keoi dei jat ding hai coeng do zo- ngo a maa keoi-
 he PL surely be change more ASP I PRX mom her
They must have changed extra.

08 我 都 知 我 阿 媽 㗎 喇 - > 一 定 係 唱 <

- ngo dou zi ngo a maa ga laa- >jat ding hai coeng-<
 I also know I PRX mom PT PT surely be change
I know my mom. She must have changed
- 09 >一定係< 唱 (.) 勁: over 佢 要用 嘅 錢
 >jat ding hai< coeng (.) ging: over keoi jiu jung ge cin
 for sure be change much she need use POSS money
changed a lot more money than she needed
- 10 然= 然= 然之後 就係 預備 好 留 比- 然之後 就
 jin= jin= jin zi hau zau hai jyu bei hou lau bei- jin zi hau zau
 th- -th- then ASP be prepare ASP leave for then ASP
so that she can...
- 11 預備 好 比 錢 佢 嚟 [喇.]
 jyu bei hou bei cin keoi ga [laa.]
 prepare ASP give money him PT PT
She's prepared to leave the money behind for him.
- 12 S: [肯]定 啦::
 [hang] ding la::
 sure
For sure.

((The topic is abandoned and the co-participants continue with other topics))

Lines 02 to 12 demonstrate how a misused stretched *lō* affects the turn shape when the two speakers handle preference (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987). The first pair part (FPP) is constructed by J at lines 02-03 where he complains that his mother left behind all the unused cash for his brother when the parents visited Australia. S notices the negative emotion, so instead of a mere news receipt to close the sequence, S offers a preferred action in a dispreferred format⁵: an account (“[the parents] feel sorry”) with mitigating words “*ngo laam*” (“I think”). It is a preferred action because in Cantonese culture (or even broader Chinese culture), it is very impolite and face-threatening to comment on another person’s family issues even amongst close friends, or if no sympathy is offered when such issues are brought up. Therefore, normally the turn is characterized by mitigation, sigh, accounts, and more utterance-final particles within, leading to a longer turn. Both speakers come from the same culture and are aware of this practice. J thus logically perceives S’s stretched *lō* at line 04 as her intention to build a longer turn, which explains why J’s transitional overlap at line 05 is cut off on hearing the device. Whereas the syntax and pragmatics of S’s evaluative remark at line 04 “*I think they feel sorry*” project turn completion, the stretched *lō* suggests turn continuation. However, it is not accompanied by S’s continuation that is expected by J, leading to a 1.0-second gap of communication breakdown at line 06. At lines 07-11, J initiates and repairs the turn by elaborating how he speculates his mom changed more than enough

⁵ “Dispreferred format” used here speaks from an English conversation analyst’s point of view. Note that *Preference* is context-dependent and may vary across cultures.

Australian dollars so that she could leave the extra cash behind for the brother. It can be observed that this turn is filled with cut-offs, quickened speech and latching in a rather random manner when compared to J's other utterances in the rest of the 42-minute conversation. I thus speculate that J is caught off-guard and did not expect himself to take up the turn so soon because of S's use of the turn-holding device at line 04. The sequence is closed with S's turn at line 12 "*hang ding la:.*" ("*For sure.*"), where S shows agreement with J's claim in the previous turn. As observed in the sequence, it is likely that S plans to do pre-closing with *lō* while she by accident stretches it, causing confusion in turn allocation.

This excerpt adequately displays, through a negative example, that the stretching of *lō* is procedurally perceived as a turn-holding device in Cantonese conversation, and the misuse of it for any reason can cause a communication breakdown.

Upon review of the instances where *lō* is used, cases are found where an unstretched *lō* is followed by a turn-continuation of the current speaker and the conversation remains smooth. Essentially they serve as evidence that refutes the argument of the research. However, it is discovered in these instances that *lō* is consistently accompanied by other turn-holding devices.

Excerpt 6 below illustrates two circumstances where, idiosyncratically yet consistently, a smooth turn-continuation occurs following an unstretched *lō*. Anterior to what is captured below, S informs J that she is about to switch phones in order to record their conversation.

(Excerpt 6: Phone: 00:01-00:43)

- 01 J: 嘩= >你呢個電話<好::差呀=
waa= >nei ni gor din waa<hou:: caa aa=
wow you this phone very bad PT
Wow this phone of yours is really bad.
- 02 >可唔可以<細聲小小:呀.
>ho mh ho ji< sai saang siu siu: aa.
can NEG can small volume little PT
Can you turn the volume down a bit.
- 03 S: → 我驚你聽唔到所以我咪大聲啲囉↑
ngo gang nei tang mh dou sor ji ngo mai daai sang dee lō↑
I afraid you hear NEG PT so I PT loud COMP PT
I'm afraid you can't hear me so I speak louder.
- 04 <>我已經<錄緊喇.
<>ngo ji ging< luk gan le.
I already record ASP PT
I'm already recording us.
- 05 J: =唔駛:呀=我唔係撞聾↑:呀.
=mh sai: aa= ngo mh hai zong lung↑: aa.
NEG need PT I NEG be deaf PT

No need. I'm not deaf.

((5 turns later))

11 J: 嘩 好- 呢 個 電 話 真 係 好 鬼 差: 呀.

waa hou- ni gor din waa zan hai hou gwai caa: aa.

wow very this CL phone really very EMP bad PT

Wo. This phone is really bad.

12 S: 同 埋 呢: >呢 個< 電 話 如 果 較 咗 speaker 呢:

tung maai ne: >ni gor< din waa jyu gwo gaau zo ne:

also PT this CL phone if set ASP PT

Also, if I set to use the speaker on this phone,

13 你 whatsapp 嗰 張 相 呢 會 勁:: 大 喺 我 個

nei gor zoeng soeng ne wui ging:: daai hai ngo gor

you that CL photo PT will super big LOC me CL

your Whatsapp photo becomes super big on my

14 → screen °囉 °=我 嗰 個 係 note three \$°囉 °\$=[好:: >大<].

°lō°=ngo gor gor hai \$°lō°\$= [hou:: >daai<].

PT I that CL be PT very big

screen. Mine is a Note 3. It's very big.

15 J: [hhhhhhhhhh] [hhhhhhhhhh]

16 S: [完 全 唔 想 見 到 你 個 樣 囉::].

[jyun cyun mh soeng gin dou nei gor joeng lō::].

totally NEG want see ASP you CL face PT

((S continues with her turn and the topic shifts her comments on J's photo))

Triggered by the switch of phones, J launches a direct complaint in the TCU at line 01 about the substandard quality of S's new handset. It also serves as a preface to his request for S to speak more softly at line 02. S notices the negative event, thus immediately produces a "not at fault" complaint treatment (Dersley and Wootton, 2000) with an account at line 03, where she explains why she uses a louder voice. It is also at this line where she adopts an unstretched *lō* in the discontinuous construction "*mai...lō*" (line 03) to express an emphatic tone (Tang, 2008), in order to magnify the pragmatic function of self-evidentiality and settlement negotiation carried by the particle. Instead of terminating her turn after *lō*, S immediately fills the CTRP and creates a new TCU with a news announcement (*I am already recording us*) in the retained turn at line 04. It serves as a remedy to further mitigate the complaint in order to reach conciliation. Note that *lō* (line 03) has an audibly higher pitch than normal, and the new TCU is accompanied by a rushed start with quickened speech at the beginning (<>*ngo ji ging*<). These salient phonetic details suggest that a turn-extension practice similar to "abrupt-join" described

by Local and Walker (2004, p.1388) is employed⁶, which overrides the CTRP opened up by *lō*. It explains the continuation of the turn despite the absence of stretching on *lō* at line 03. J then ridicules the defense at line 05, leading to conciliation.

After a short conversation comprised of five turns (skipped in the transcript), J does complaining directly again about the quality of the phone at line 11. In response, S offers “an alternative characterization of the defense” (Dersley and Wootton, 2000) and shifts the topic to the enlarged photo of J’s on her phone. She constructs a compound TCU at lines 12-14 (*If I set to use... your Whatsapp photo...screen*). At line 14, two instances of turn-continuation following an unstretched *lō* are observed. The first *lō* is suffixed to the final component of the compound TCU (henceforth denoted as 14a); the second is adhered to the subsequent turn, an implicature (*ngo gor gor hai note three \$lo°\$=// “Mine is a Note 3”*) (hereafter denoted as 14b), immediately followed by its explanation (“*It’s very big*”). In order to invite a conciliatory response from J (the complainer) in the third position of the complaint sequence (Wong and Waring, 2010), S uses an account and remedy in her alternative characterization of the defense as mitigation. Therefore, she creates an extended turn. The utterance-final particle *lō* affords the pragmatic meaning of evidentiality and annoyance as displayed in the intonation, while in both instances they are succeeded by latching, which is a typical turn-extension practice (ibid). It explains the occurrence of turn continuation even when *lō* is not stretched and answers the question about how exactly the mechanism in overriding *lo*’s discourse role works (Leung and Gibbons, 2011; Luke, 1990).

The instances in Excerpt 6 adequately capture a typical marked condition – accompaniment of other turn-holding practices – where turn continuation occurs even after an unstretched *lō*. Furthermore, what attracts the researcher’s attention in particular is that the particle *lō* (14a and 14b) is characterized by a lower volume, which is possibly due to regressive assimilation to aid latching for the turn-extension. It may hint that the softening of *lō* has a structural conversational property as a turn-holding device by itself and/or when used with latching. However, there is insufficient data to verify the speculation.

5. Discussion

For easy conceptualization of what is discussed, a summary of finding is provided in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Summary of excerpt analyses

Excerpt	Is <i>lo</i> stretched?	Turn allocation as illustrated in the data	Communication Breakdown?	Remarks
1	NO	Turn transitioned: next	NO	Assumption

⁶ There are features of “abrupt-join” that do not apply to Cantonese due to its phonological differences to English. This instance at lines 03-04 exhibits the features applicable to Cantonese, thus my treatment for its as a turn-extension practice “similar to ‘abrupt-join’”.

		speaker self-selects		confirmed
2	NO	Turn transition interrupted by gap	YES	Repair needed
3	YES	Turn held by current speaker	NO	Assumption confirmed
4	YES	Turn held by current speaker	NO	Assumption confirmed; turn held even when current speaker is has not organized thoughts well
5	YES	Turn transition interrupted by gap	YES	Repair needed
6	NO	Turn held by current speaker	NO	Turn continuation aided by other turn-holding practices (e.g. latching)

In response to the research questions, the analyses of the six excerpts essentially confirm the assumptions that:

- (a) an unstretched *lō* prompts turn transition,
- (b) a stretched *lō* functions as a turn-holding device

I argue that these concepts are ingrained in native speakers' implicit knowledge because, as shown in the behaviors of the native Cantonese-speaking participants, a violation of them invariably leads to communication breakdown. That native speakers systematically treat the violation as a trouble source is strong evidence that they are part of the implicit knowledge.

Excerpt 1 draws the baseline for this paper, illustrating that an unstretched *lō* unfolds a CTRP and promotes turn transition. The seamless transition should be compared with the communication breakdown in Excerpt 2, where an unstretched *lō* is employed while the next speaker fails to self-select and pick up the turn. Instances in Excerpts 3 and 4 manifest how speakers strategically take advantage of a stretched *lō* in order to hold a turn to convey contextual and pragmatic meaning. They are in stark contrast with those in Excerpt 5, where repair practices are required thanks to a communication breakdown created by the current speaker who does not continue with the turn upon the use of a stretched *lō*. While Excerpt 6 features instances where the CTRP is not available for turn transition despite the utilization of an unstretched *lō*, it is justified by the fact that other turn-holding practices are employed, including latching and abrupt-join. Instead of serving as a challenge to this paper's argument, Excerpt 6, together with the rest, in fact illuminates an unexplored aspect of research for the subject matter and helps to fill the gap left open by Leung and Gibbons (2011) and Luke (1990) in terms of

the mechanism of turn allocation involving utterance-particle. Moreover, the data analyzed in this paper comes from a telephone conversation. With the absence of paralinguistic cues such as gaze and gestures, participants can only rely on the spoken discourse and conversation objects in terms of turn allocation. It gives more weight to the role of these verbal practices and devices when it comes to turn construction, enhancing the validity of the paper's arguments. Importantly, in spite of their conversational role in turn allocation, their pragmatic functions remain intact and specific to the situational contexts in which they appear.

An interesting finding in the investigation is that, when used with latching, *lō* is pronounced softly. While an initial speculation is that regressive assimilation occurs phonetically to aid utterance production, it is worthwhile to study this pattern in greater detail in terms of its behavior or even systematicity in its co-occurrence with latching as a turn-holding device.

As established in existing literature, the versatility of the utterance-final particle *lō* gives rise to its omnipresence in Cantonese conversation, especially for coloring affection and emotion conveyed by the speakers. Its frequency of use is naturally higher in casual conversations or among close friends (Chan, 1998), such as the participants in the study. It would be of value if more contrastive studies were done with more formal settings, such as the one by Leung and Gibbons (2011) on courtrooms in Hong Kong.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown in my analysis that albeit the use of *lō* possibly opens up a CTRP, stretching it systematically marks a speaker's intention to continue with the his/her current turn while keeping the pragmatic functions of affective coloring and inviting sympathy (or agreement or cooperation) intact. Its concurrent use with other turn-holding devices such as latching and big breath entails that these elements share similar functions in this regard. They serve as strategic alternatives for one another to avoid an utterance sounding unnatural, although the use of a stretched *lō* is restricted by its other pragmatic functions (such as affective coloring) and suffix positioning. Moreover, the deliberate use of a stretched *lō* allows a speaker to retain his/her turn even when s/he is not prepared for it. It is conceptually ingrained in native speakers' minds as a turn-holding device, which contributes to the seamless turn allocation in naturally occurring conversation. Note that simultaneously the particle's discourse role in turn allocation can be overridden by other devices and practices.

It should be evident by now that utterance-final particles carry essential pragmatic functions. An important finding is that, as I have demonstrated, these functions (in the case of *lō*: completion proposal and ending negotiation) can possibly be altered or even eliminated (in the current case, by stretching). This leads to other questions: does the same apply to another utterance-final particle *lā*, which shares very similar properties with *lō*? What other practices can alter the pragmatic functions of these particles, and in

what way(s)? How do these particles contribute to turn organization, sequence management and other conversational practices?

A major limitation in this study is the narrow range of participants. As discussed, factors such as the role, relationship, and setting may have an effect on the use of these Cantonese particles. One may argue that the excerpts only demonstrate how the particular two speakers use the language, and the style is specific to them. Valid though the speculation about its generalizability, this research is exploratory in nature and aims to provide an under-utilized perspective in the field of Cantonese linguistics to analyze conversational data. While the properties, grammar and pragmatic functions of them are extensively researched and studied, their role in conversation as a structural unit is seldom investigated. The current study opens up a wider avenue of research possibilities about the behavior of these particles, which, though trivial-looking, are by contrast instrumental in bonding utterances and keeping Cantonese conversation in one natural piece.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Key 1 (see Schegloff, 2007 for detailed explanations)	=	(equal sign) latch or contiguous utterance.
.	(0.4)	(number in parentheses) length of a silence in 10ths of a second.
?	(.)	(period in parentheses) micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
,	((gazing))	non-speech activity or transcriptionist comment.
-	\$word\$	smiley voice.
::		
<u>word</u>		
WORD		
°word°		
↑word		
↓word		
>word<		
<word>		
<		
hh		
.hh		
(hh)		
[]		
[]		

(period) falling intonation.		
(question mark) rising intonation.		
(comma) continuing intonation.		
(hyphen) abrupt cut-off.		
(colon) prolonging of sound.		
(underline) stress; the more underlying, the greater the stress.		
(upper case) loud speech.		
(degree symbols) quiet speech.		
(upward arrow) raised pitch.		
(downward arrow) lowered pitch.		
(more than and less than signs) quicker speech.		
(less than and more than signs) slower speech.		
(less than) jump start or rushed start.		
(series of h's) aspiration or laughter		
(h's preceded by dots) inhalation.		
(h's in parentheses) aspiration or laughter inside word boundaries		
(set of lined-up brackets) beginning and ending of		
simultaneous or overlapping speech.		

Transcription Key 2		
ASP		aspect marker
COMP		comparative marker
CL		classifier
EMP		emphatic marker
EXCLM		exclamation
LOC		location marker
NEG		negative marker
PT		particle
PL		plural marker
POSS		possessive case marker
PRX		prefix

Information Structure in English, Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Southern Min: Argument Realization of Ditransitive Objects

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This study investigates the discourse-pragmatic properties of ditransitive constructions in English, Mandarin Chinese (MC) and Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM) based on argument realization patterns of the ditransitive objects in discourse contexts. The specific focuses are on the conditioning factors of two linguistic phenomena: word ordering variation and argument omission. Three main corpus-based observations are developed. First, the favored positions of overt objects were found to be largely conditioned by the informational-statuses they carry. Second, contra to the traditional prescriptive view that English, which is a non-pro-drop language, does not allow zero pronominals in the argument positions of finite clauses, under closer observation, the data reveals that even in English, ditransitive arguments carrying Hearer-Old, Discourse-Old or Inferrable information can surface as zero anaphora, given that recoverability of unexpressed elements can be carried out by addressees provided with sufficient background or discourse information. This indicates the significant role that information structure plays in the surface argument realization of nominal objects.

1. Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed a growing interest in research on the cognitive and pragmatic nature of human communication. Particular attention has been paid to the effects of cognitive and pragmatic factors on language use. One of the most important approaches to this problem involves the concept of Information Structure (Halliday 1967), which asserts that coherent discourse is organized into ‘information units’ (ibid.: 200). A core issue concerns the nature of the syntax-pragmatics interface, in particular “how information is ‘packaged’ in a sentence by taking into account what is understood to be the listener’s and speaker’s common ground” (Goldberg 2014). Messages conveying identical truth conditions have been observed to be expressed through distinct grammatical constructions characterized by varying pragmatic functions. These “pragmatically specialized constructions” (Gregory & Michaelis 2001) tend to constitute “marked” ways of indicating certain discourse functions, inviting the addressee to consider the speaker’s possible motivation for using an apparently non-canonical, “uneconomic” construction (Searle et al. 1980). The most notable cases of pragmatically

marked constructions include topicalization and left-dislocation, as illustrated by the following examples provided by Goldberg (2014), cited from Lambrecht (2001):

- (1) a. Left-dislocation: A single ticket, she bought it yesterday.
 b. Topicalization: A single ticket, she bought yesterday.

This minimal pair of clauses, though expressing the same truth-conditional information, are argued to serve distinct pragmatic-discourse functions: the nominal in the left-dislocation construction is new to the hearer, while its counterpart in the topicalization construction is likely to be previously mentioned (Gregory and Michaelis 2001, Goldberg 2014). From this example, we can see that nominals with different informational-statuses can occur in distinct syntactic structures. In Information Structure research, therefore, it is necessary to pin down the association between (i) the specific grammatical positions in which certain nominals occur and (ii) the informational states of the referents denoted by the nominal arguments in the associated discourse.

In addition to pragmatically marked constructions, in ordinary syntactic structures, it has also been observed that word order is relevant to determining the discourse-pragmatic characteristics of a nominal referring expression. Specifically, the syntactic position in which a nominal phrase (NP) occurs is strongly associated with a given informational status. For example, an NP in canonical subject position tends to be definite (Li and Thompson 1976, Givón 1976) and carry old information (Chafe 1976), while an NP in a non-canonical subject position, such as an existential construction, tends to be indefinite and new to the addressee's attention (Prince 1992). The contrast can be illustrated by the following sentences.

- (2) a. The/*A man is jogging in the park.
 b. There is a/*the man jogging in the park.

To study the interactions between word order of NPs and their pragmatic nature, we must first understand the informational status of discourse entities denoted by NPs. Different types of nominal informational states have been proposed and discussed in the literature. In his seminal work, Chafe (1976) identifies several key information-structural components of discourse, many of which have been further investigated in a subsequence of studies, including the following dichotomies: Given/Old vs. New; Focus vs. Background; Topic vs. Comment (Zimmermann & Féry 2009).

In addition to these pairs of information-structural categories, it has also been pointed out that in successful communication, information exchanges are conducted following certain discourse principles which ease short-term memory load in information processing. The principles include 1) the Given-Before-New Principle (Gundel 1988), also known as the Old-to-New Principle (Tang 2011, 2012), 2) the One New Idea Constraint (Chafe 1987), and 3) Heaviness.

Ditransitives are an ideal conduit for the study of word order variation, given their well-known participation in the double-object and prepositional dative forms, illustrated by the following sentences. The former variant is referred to here as ‘Double Object Construction’ (DOC) and the latter ‘Prepositional Dative Construction’ (PDC). The research questions that this study pursues include both empirical and theoretical points of inquiry, as listed below.

- (3) a. In natural speech, what are the distributional patterns of ditransitive arguments in English, MC and TSM?
 b. What are the discourse principles governing these patterns? Which are universal and which are language-specific?
 c. How do these principles shed light on general information-structural theories and typological linguistics?

2. Word Ordering Variation and Argument Omission

Two of the key issues in Information Structure concerning surface argument realization are constituent ordering variation and (c)overt forms of nominal arguments. Ditransitive arguments serve as one platform for research into these issues, since in actual language use, speakers can highlight or background the three participants bearing varying informational-statuses by implicitly or explicitly expressing them as well as by ordering them in a certain way.

Ditransitives are an ideal conduit for the study of word order variation, given their well-known participation in the double-object and prepositional dative forms, illustrated by the following sentences. The former variant is referred to here as ‘Double Object Construction’ (DOC) and the latter ‘Prepositional Dative Construction’ (PDC), illustrated by the English examples below, noted their counterparts in MC and TSM are alike.

- (4) a. DOC: I sent her a book.
 b. PDC: I sent a book to her.

In the DOC, the indirect object (IO) precedes the direct object (DO), and both the objects are unmarked. In the PDC, the order is reversed, i.e. the IO follows the DO; besides, while the DO is unmarked, the IO is marked by a Recipient marker. Whereas the two variants, DOC and PDC, are both common in English, MC, and TSM¹, a third variant is found in MC and TSM, without a corresponding construction in English, as illustrated below.

¹ The MC examples are 我送她一本書 *wo³ song⁴ ta¹ yi¹ ben³ shu¹* (DOC) and 我送一本書給她 *wo³ song⁴ yi¹ ben³ shu¹ gei³ ta¹* (PDC). The TSM counterparts are 我送伊一本書 *gua² sang² i¹ tsit⁸ bun² tshet⁴* and 我送一本書予伊 *gua² sang² tsit⁸ bun² tshet⁴ hoo⁷ i¹*. Details will be given later.

- (5) a. 我 送 給 她 一 朵 花 (MC)
 wo¹ song⁴ gei³ ta¹ yi¹ duo³ hua¹
 1SG² send give 3SG one CL flower
 ‘I gave her a flower.’
- b. 我 送 予 伊 一 蕊 花 (TSM)
 gua² sang³ hoo⁷ i¹ tsit⁸ liu² hue¹
 1SG send give 3SG one CL flower
 ‘I gave her a flower.’

This pattern resembles the common DOC in its surface structure, with one distinction: an additional element immediately following the ditransitive verb. This additional element is fixed and is phonologically identical to the prototypical ditransitive verb in MC and TSM, which is standardly used to express possessional transfer events without specifying the manner of transfer: the form of this default ditransitive is gei³ 給 ‘give’ (MC) and hoo⁷ 予 ‘give’ (TSM). In the present study, I will follow Cheng et al. (1999) in indicating this third syntactic variant as DOC-2, and referring the common DOC as DOC-1.

In the literature of ditransitive verbs and constructions, the most widely discussed topic concerns ‘dative alternation’, which have been investigated from two empirical and theoretical perspectives. The first issue is empirical: which verbs can and which verbs cannot participate in dative alternation? (e.g. Gropen et al. 1989, Levin 1993) The second issue is theoretical: is the apparent ‘alternation’ truly alternation from one syntactic pattern to another? That is, are the syntactic variants structurally and semantically related to each other or are they in fact independent from each other? (e.g. Goldberg 1995, 2006, Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2008, F. Liu 2006) Past accounts have relied heavily on intuitive contrasts or elicited data, with the result that a certain amount of disagreement has arisen concerning grammaticality/acceptability judgments, as well as the limited scope of research and potential bias arising from various linguistic and non-linguistic factors (Bresnan and Nikitina 2003). To counteract these potential problems and focus specifically on potential discourse factors in language use, the data analyzed in the present study are all taken from corpora of actual (television script) conversations between interlocutors. The English data are taken from *Friends*, a popular American TV series that aired from 1994 to 2004. Dialogue within the sitcom primarily takes place

² The abbreviations used in this papers include: 1SG (First person singular pronouns), 2SG (Second person singular pronouns), 3SG (Third person singular pronouns), ACC (Accusative markers introducing Theme or Patient in disposal construction, such as ba³ 把 in MC and ka⁷ 共 or tsiong¹ 將 in TSM), AM (Agent markers in passive construction, such as bei⁴ 被 in MC and hoo⁷ 予 in TSM), ASP (Aspect markers), COP (Copolcoa), CAU (causative markers), CL (Classifiers, including nominal and verbal classifiers), COM (Comitative markers), POSS (Possessive markers), and SFP (Sentence final particle).

among the six main characters who have been close friends for years, three female and three male³: Rachel Green, Monica Geller, Phoebe Buffay, Joey Tribbiani, Chandler Bing, and Ross Geller. The first two seasons, which comprise of 48 episodes, each of which lasts about 22 minutes, were chosen as the English database. The MC and TSM conversational data used in this study are extracted from dialogues found in the scripts of two Taiwanese TV programs: 白先勇 Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai's *Niezi* 孽子 ("Crystal Boys")⁴ and 吳豐秋 Feng-Qui Wu's *Houshan Ri Xian Zhao* 後山日先照 ("The Sun Shines First Behind the Mountain")⁵, both produced and aired by Public Television Service, Taiwan. The former first aired in 2003 and the latter in 2002. Both TV programs comprise 20 episodes, each of which lasts about 50 minutes.

The second issue addressed in this study involves argument omission. In spoken environments, particularly in face-to-face conversation, certain constituents are frequently left unexpressed. In the following excerpt extracted from the fourth episode of the first season of *Friends*, the character Ross has been sent to a hospital emergency room by his friends Joey and Chandler after being unexpectedly hit on the nose by a hockey puck. After checking in at the E.R. counter, Ross discovers with dismay that the puck is missing. Turning to his friends for inquiry, he realizes that a kid in the room has picked up the puck and kept it with him. Ross then asks the kid to return the puck 'Gimme!' In this apparently complete clause, not only is the subject null (standard in English in the imperative mood), but the direct object is also covert, a fact that seem to violate the prescriptive rules concerning the prototypical ditransitive verb give. Why is it that in "real life" situations, the Theme argument of give can be left unexpressed? This is one of the questions the present study will to pursue.

3. Informational Statures

Within a communicative context, the speaker's assumptions concerning the addressee's background knowledge determine what information is treated as "given" and what information is considered to be "new" (e.g. Chafe 1987). Much recent scholarship has demonstrated that the syntactic position occupied by an NP bears a certain correlation with the kind of information it carries. For example, NPs in Subject position tend to be definite (Prince 1992: 297-298), while Topic NPs tend to carry old information (Li and Thompson 1976). According to Prince (1992), a finer distinction can be made about the information status of discourse entities. These contrasts pertain specifically to (i) the speaker's assumption about the hearer's knowledge state and (ii) the information state within the discourse context.

The first distinction can be labeled *Hearer-old versus Hearer-new* (Prince 1992: 301-303). As the name suggests, "Hearer-old" information is information that the speaker

³ http://friends.wikia.com/wiki/Friends_Wiki

⁴ <http://web.pts.org.tw/~web01/boys/#>

⁵ <http://web.pts.org.tw/~web01/sunshine/>

assumes the addressee possesses and that will allow the addressee to identify the entity designated by the NP. By contrast, “Hearer-new” information describes any kind of mental entity that the speaker assumes “not to be already known to the hearer” (*ibid.*: 302). Whether an entity in the information context is considered Hearer-old or Hearer-new can be ascertained based on the speaker’s choice of linguistic expression when referring to that entity.

(6) a. **The Use of Proper Name to Refer to Hearer-old Information**

I’m waiting for it to be noon so I can call Sandy Thompson. (*ibid.*: 301, ex. (11))

b. **The Use of Indefinite NP to Refer to Hearer-new Information**

I’m waiting for it to be noon so I can call someone in California. (*ibid.*, ex. (12))

As can be seen from the minimal pair above, different linguistic forms are exploited to package different kinds of information. Generally speaking, definite NPs, pronouns, and proper names carry Hearer-old information, while indefinite NPs carry Hearer-new information.

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The second information-status distinction concerns discourse structure. In this context, a three-way distinction is made between *Discourse-old*, *Discourse-new*, and *Inferrable* information (Prince 1992: 303-308). An NP carrying Discourse-old information is one “that has already been evoked in the prior discourse-stretch,” whereas a Discourse-new NP “has not previously occurred in the prior discourse-stretch” (*ibid.*: 303). The Discourse-old versus Discourse-new distinction depends on the structure and stage of the discourse itself. In the discourse-initial stage, NPs are most likely to be Discourse-new. Once an NP has been mentioned in the discourse, it becomes Discourse-old in later stages. Linguistically speaking, pronouns are one typical device used to mark Discourse-old entities.

The third type of information, **Inferrable** information, is held by NPs whose referents are assumed to be identifiable by the hearer “based on the speaker’s beliefs about the hearer’s beliefs and reasoning ability” (*ibid.*: 304). Prince’s classic example of Inferrable information is shown below.

(7) He passed by the Bastille and the door was painted purple. (*ibid.*: 305, ex. (17b))

The NP *the door* has never been mentioned in prior discourse. However, the speaker assumes the addressee is able to infer the reference “the door [of the Bastille]” based on his or her basic reasoning ability and knowledge of buildings. The NP *the door* therefore carries Inferrable information. In this study, the notions *Hearer-old vs. Hearer-new* and

Discourse-old, *Discourse-new* and *Inferrable* are used to describe and analyze ditransitive arguments in the corpora.

4. Prototypicality of Ditransitive Constructions

One of the most prototypical ditransitive constructions is the DOC. In English, there is only one type of DOC. In MC and TSM, there are two sub-types of DOCs, termed as DOC-1 and DOC-2 in the present study; the former consists of only one ditransitive verb and the latter consists of two subsequent ditransitive verbs. Admittedly, DOC-1 is a legitimate ditransitive construction in all three languages as observed in the literature. Intriguingly, as the table presented in the last sub-section shows, DOC-1 occurred much more often than the other five patterns in English and MC, but the frequency of DOC-1 in the corpora of TSM is less than that of PDC. The investigation in discourse contexts shows that the DOC-1 is frequently used to package new DO. In other words, the DOC-1 tends to occur at the beginning parts of a thematic paragraph, as shown in the following data sets.

(8) One Excerpt in English (taken from F4.8)

Chandler: Hey, by any chance did either of you pick uh Rachel for your secret Santa,
‘cause I wanna trade for her.

Phoebe: I picked her! Oh thank God you want her! Ooh!

Chandler: Wow! Why do you want to get rid of her so badly?

→ Phoebe: Because she exchanges every gift she ever gets, it’s like impossible to get her something she likes. Come on, let’s trade!

→ Chandler: Oh that’s not true! I got her that backpack and she loved it! I remember how much she was crying the day when that big dog ran off with it...(notices the look on Monica and Phoebe’s faces.) Oh, there was no big dog. All right this sucks! I already got her this briefcase, and I had R.G. put on it...(Phoebe looks confused.) Her initials...

Phoebe: Ohh.

→ Monica: Well, maybe you could give it to somebody else. Ooh, like Ross Geller.

In the conversational exchanges above, there are four clauses expressing transferring events, indicated by the arrows. As is evidenced from the discourse context, the IOs in the first three instances carry Discourse-Old information and that in the last instance carry Discourse-New information; on the contrary, the DOs in the first three instances carry Discourse-Old information and that in the last instance carry Discourse-New information. Specifically, the first three IOs, surface as the third person singular pronoun *her*, which refers to Rachel, have already been mentioned in the first utterance. The IOs, therefore, carry Discourse-Old information. The final IO, *somebody else*, on the contrary, carries Discourse-New information, as it refers to a new discourse entity never mentioned before and unknown to the addressee. As for the DOs in the four clauses, the first three

all surface as full NPs, and the last one pronoun *it*. The first three DOs carry Discourse-New information, and the last one carries Discourse-Old information. This distributional pattern can be illustrated by the following table.

Obj Clause	IO		DO	
	Linguistic Form	IS	Linguistic Form	IS
#1: DOC	Pronouns (her)	Discourse-Old	Full NP (<i>something she likes</i>)	Discourse-New
#2: DOC			Full NP (<i>that backpack</i>)	
#3: DOC			Full NP (<i>this briefcase</i>)	
#4: PDC	Full NP (<i>somebody else</i>)	Discourse-New	Pronouns (<i>it</i>)	Discourse-Old

Table 1 Informational-Statuses (IS) of Ditransitive Objects

As can be seen from this table, the DOC introduces old IO and new DO, and the PDC introduces new IO and old DO. This finding echoes several previous studies, such as Goldberg (2006: 148), in suggesting the DO in the DOC carries new or accessible information, while the IO in this construction bears old information, thus functioning as the secondary topic in the clause.

While the DOC-1 is a prototypical ditransitive construction in the three languages, the DOC-2 does not exist in English, and is rarely found in the corpora of MC and TSM. DOC-2 has received abundant attention in the research of MC. Previous research has focused on arguing about a) the grammatical status of the second ditransitive verb in this structure, b) any possible transformational relations between this structure and Prepositional Dative Construction, and c) similarities and differences concerning constructional meanings between DOC-2 and other ditransitive constructions. Extremely little attention has been paid to the distributional patterns of ditransitive constructions, including DOC-2, in actual language use. A survey based on the MC and TSM reveals that DOC-2 in its canonical format (Subj+V₁+V₂+IO+DO) was actually seldom used. When *gei*³ 給 (MC)/*hoo*⁷ 予 (TSM) is immediately adjacent to ditransitive verbs forming V-GIVE sequence, DO normally occurred before the V-GIVE sequence rather than after it. This rarity of the DOC-2 in its canonical format is also reported by Chen (2005) in her corpus-based survey of TSM narratives. It seems therefore the low frequency of the DOC-2 is true at least both in face-to-face conversations and narratives.

Last but not least, the PDC shows cross-linguistic difference: The PDC in English introduces old DO, but that in MC and TSM introduces new DOs. Compare the following sets of data:

(9) a. PDC in English

→ Rachel: I guess this_i belongs to you. And thank you for giving it_i to me.

Barry: Well, thank you for giving it back. (F1.2)

b. PDC in MC

- 耕土：我一到台北就馬上寫信給妳。妳要回信給我喔。
wo³ yi¹ dao⁴ tai²-bei³ jiu⁴ ma³-shang⁴ xie³ xin⁴ gei³ ni³ ni³ yao⁴ hui² xin⁴ gei³ wo³ o
 1SG once arrive Taipei ADV immediately write letter give 2SG
 2SG need return mail give 1SG SFP
 ‘I’ll write you a mail as soon as I arrive at Taipei. You’ll reply my mail!’
- 雅慧：那我現在就先念一封古人的信給你聽。(H18)
na⁴ wo³ xian⁴ -zat⁴ jiu⁴ xian¹ nian⁴ yi⁴ feng¹ gu³-ren² de xin⁴ gei³ ni³ ting¹
 then 1SG now then first read one CL ancient.people NOMI letter
 give 2SG listen
 ‘Then I’m now reading a letter written by ancient people to you.’

c. PDC in TSM

- 耕州：ni 桑,攏無郎恰我耍,你恰我耍好無?
ni-san long² bo⁵ lang⁵ kah⁴ gua² sng² li² kah⁴ gua² sng² ho² bo⁵
 brother all NEG people with 1SG play 2SG with 1SG play well NEG
 ‘Brother. No one’s playing with me. Will you play with me?’
- 耕河：ni 桑佇寫功課,無閒啦。耕土,你提金珠子予伊耍。(H1)
ni-san ti⁷ sia² kong¹-kho³ bo⁵ ing⁵ lah⁴
king¹-thoo² li² theh⁸ kim¹-tsu¹-a² hoo⁷ i¹ sng²
 brother PROG write homework NEG available
 name 2SG bring gold.ball.DIM give 3SG play
 ‘I’m writing my homework. I’m not available. Geng-tu, bring him a ball
 for him to play.’

In the English example, the DO in the PDC which surfaces as pronoun *it*, carries Discourse-Old, as it co-indexed with its antecedent *this*, which is mentioned in the previous clause. In the MC and TSM examples, on the contrary, the DOs in the PDC surfaced as either bare NPs *xin⁴* 信 ‘letter’ (MC)/*kim¹-tsu¹-a²* ‘golden ball’ (TSM), or an indefinite NP *yi⁴ feng¹ gu³-ren² de xin⁴* 一封古人的信 ‘a letter written by ancient people’. The grammatical markings of bare NPs and indefinite NPs suggest relatively new information. Notice that although the second appearance of *xin⁴* 信 ‘letter’ in the MC data seems to indicate Discourse-Old information, however, the discourse referents of the two tokens of *xin⁴* 信 ‘letter’ are distinct: the first one is supposedly being written by the speaker Geng-tu 耕土 and the other one replied by the addressee Ya-hui 雅慧. These two DOs therefore both carry Discourse-New information.

5. Null IOs and DOs

In the examples to be presented here, both the ditransitive objects were surfaced as zero pronominals. They share the identical pragmatic-discourse characteristics with the null IOs and null DOs discussed in the previous two sub-sections.

To begin with, both Recipient and Theme in the example below are non-specific entities in the transferring event. They, as a result, carry Inferrable information.

(10) Null DOs and IOs carrying Inferrable information

Monica: This is so typical. Y'know, we give $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ $\emptyset_{[\text{Theme}]}$, and we give $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ $\emptyset_{[\text{Theme}]}$, and we give $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ $\emptyset_{[\text{Theme}]}$. And then- we just get nothing back!
(F1.11)

When the referent does not refer to a specific entity but carries generic meaning, i.e., carrying Inferrable information, it can be expressed by a zero form, despite the absence of a proper antecedent, as long as the speaker assumes the addressee is able to figure out the referent for the absent arguments.

In the next conversation exchanges, an interesting phenomenon is observed. On the one hand, among the multiple occurrences of the verb *pue*⁵ 賠 ‘compensate’, some Theme arguments were realized as a full NP *tsinn*⁵ 錢 ‘money’ and some as zero pronominals. On the other hand, the Recipient argument was firstly realized as a zero form, then a full NP *kok*⁴-*ka*¹ 國家 ‘country’, and then a zero pronominal.

(11) 滿堂：耕山仔乞予軍校退學啦，閣乞予人押轉來啦！

*king*¹-*san*¹-*a* *khit*⁴-*hoo*⁷ *kun*¹-*hau*⁷ *the*³-*hak*⁸ *lah*⁴ *kho*⁴ *khit*⁴-*hoo*⁷ *lang*⁵ *ah*⁴ *tng*²-*lai*⁵ *lah*⁴
name AM military.school flunk SFP also AM people escort DC SFP

彩雲：啊轉來嘛好啊，轉來厝內嘛較有人通照顧。

*ah*⁴ *tng*²-*lai*⁵ *ma*⁷ *ho*³ *ah*⁴ *tng*²-*lai*⁵ *tshu*³-*lai*⁷ *ma*⁷ *ka*⁴ *u*⁷ *lang*⁵ *thang*¹ *tsiau*³-*kaa*³
DM return also well return house.inside also more have people can take.care

→滿堂：講較簡單啦！退學啊，是愛賠 $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ 錢_j呢！

*kong*² *ka*⁴ *kan*²-*tan*¹ *lah*⁴ *the*³-*hak*⁸ *ah*⁴ *si*⁷ *ai*³ *pue*⁵ *tsinn*⁵ *neh*⁴
say more easy SFP flunk SFP FM need compensate money SFP

伊食的啊，帶的啊，穿的啊，攏是愛賠錢_j予國家_i呢！加起來是缺少錢呢！

*i*¹ *tsiah*⁸ *e*⁵ *ah*⁴ *tua*³ *e*⁵ *ah*⁴ *tshing*⁷ *e*⁵ *ah*⁴ *long*² *si*⁷ *ai*³ *pue*⁵ *tsinn*⁵ *hoo*⁷ *kok*⁴-*ka*¹ *neh*⁴ *ka*¹ *khi*³-*lai*⁵ *si*⁷ *be*⁷ *tsio*² *tsinn*⁵ *neh*⁴

3SG eat NOMI SFP bring NOMI SFP wear NOMI SFP all FM need compensate money give country SFP add INCH FM will NEG money SFP

→招治：賠 $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ $\emptyset_{[\text{Theme}]}$ 就賠 $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ $\emptyset_{[\text{Theme}]}$ 啊，就算講賠 $\emptyset_{[\text{Recipient}]}$ 錢_j呼，嘛愛共我的囡仔換轉來啦！

*to*⁷-*sng*³ *kong*² *pue*⁵ *tsinn*⁵ *hoo*⁴ *ma*⁷ *ai*³ *ka*⁷ *gua*² *e*⁵ *gin*²-*a*² *uann*⁷ *tng*²-*lai*⁵ *lah*⁴
even say compensate money SFP also need ACC 1SG NOMI child exchange DC SFP

- ‘Buan-tng: King-san was flunk by the military school. He was even escorted back.
 Tsio-ti: It’s nice for him to come back. It’s easier to have people look after him in the household.
 Buan-tng: It’s easy for you to say. We need to compensate money once he was flunk by school. We need to compensate every penny he spent on eating, bringing, and wearing. That’s a lot of money.
 Tsio-ti: Then we just pay the country! Even though we need to compensate the country, I still will have my child back.’ (H15)

It is possible that in the first mention of the compensating event, the speaker Buan-tng 滿堂 emphasized the Theme *tsinn*⁵ 錢 ‘money’, and then in the second mention, he wished to specify the Recipient of the compensating event *kok*⁴-*ka*¹ 國家 ‘country’ in addition to the Theme *tsinn*⁵ 錢 ‘money’. In this second occurrence of the verb *pue*⁵ 賠 ‘compensate’ therefore, both objects were expressed by full NPs. On hearing her husband’s complaint, Tsio-ti 招治 argued back by asserting that no matter how much money they needed to compensate whoever it was, she would want her son back, which is her priority in this event. As a result, neither Theme nor Recipient was specified in her utterance. Her next utterances focused on the fact that money is what they needed to compensate the country, and therefore *tsinn*⁵ 錢 ‘money’ was continuously maintained in the utterances to form a topic chain, while the Recipient was left unexpressed.

From the discussion above, it seems that the speaker’s choice about emphasizing one or two ditransitive object results in the various selection of linguistic forms. The speaker can just emphasize on the event itself, regardless of who the Recipient is and what the Theme is. In this scenario, only the verb stands out. This echoes back to Goldberg’s (2001) “Omission under Low Discourse Prominence” principle, which asserts that (*ibid.*: 514):

Omission of the patient argument is possible when the patient argument is construed to be deemphasized in the discourse vis a vis the action. That is, omission is possible when the patient argument is not topical (or focal) in the discourse, and the action is particularly emphasized (via repetition, strong affective stance, discourse topicality, contrastive focus, etc).

In the dialogue in (11), strong affective stance seems to be the cause for emphasizing the action and deemphasizing both objects, as the mother was eager to have her son back regardless how much she needs to compensate whoever it is. Speakers’ choices of using overt or covert forms to express the objects depend not only on the informational-status of the discourse entities but also on the emphasis the speakers choose to make on the event or on the participant(s) in the event.

6. Conclusion

The present study has provided an empirical description of the surface realization patterns of ditransitive objects in face-to-face conversation of English, MC and TSM. The need for a research on **word ordering variation** and **argument omission** based on a data-driven analysis in discourse contexts is emphasized. It shows how three-place predicates serve as one ideal candidate for study at the pragmatics-syntax interface, given their large number of arguments, multiple possible syntactic locations, and various surface forms.

Significantly, the study has shown that cross-linguistically, non-inherent ditransitive verbs are more restricted in distribution. Moreover, a comparison across the three languages investigated here has revealed an asymmetric distributional pattern with respect to complement configurations. Specifically, the non-inherent ditransitive verbs in English can only occur in the DOC, but not the PDC. The MC and TSM equivalents, on the contrary, can only occur in the PDC, but hardly the DOC. Furthermore, a comparison of the argument structure constructions recurrently observed in the corpora of English, MC and TSM, as well as the preferred positions that ditransitive objects of these three languages has revealed that the favored positions of overt objects were found to be largely conditioned by the informational-statuses they carry. The distributional patterns have also shown a cross-linguistic distinction. In English, new DOs occur in the DOC and old DOs occur in the PDC. The DOs in PDC therefore often surface as pronouns. Generic or non-specific DOs and IOs, on the other hand, are frequently realized as zero anaphors. In MC and TSM, on the other hand, new DOs can occur in the DOC or the PDC, while old DOs predominantly occur in preverbal positions, including Topicalization, Object Fronting, and Disposal Construction. The findings carry theoretical implication in the study of pragmatic characteristics of syntactic constructions. While pragmatically marked constructions, such as Topicalization, have attracted much attention from linguistics to investigate their discourse properties and constraints, linguists have rarely paid attention to pragmatically ‘neutral’ constructions, such as the DOC and the PDC, with respect to their communicative functions. Corpus-based scrutiny with sufficient contextual information contributes to investigations concerning constructions’ pragmatic characteristics. Finally, the distributional patterns of null ditransitive arguments show that distinct to overt objects, null objects were found to carry most often Discourse-Old information, then Inferrables, and finally Hearer-Old information. For zero objects with Discourse-Old information, the antecedent occurred in prior linguistic contexts. Significantly, the coreferential relations between the zero anaphors and their previously occurred antecedents are not always restricted within clause boundaries. Often in the face-to-face communications, antecedents are much likely to be mentioned several clauses away. In the study of discourse, therefore, the examination of zero anaphors and their coreferential antecedents needs to be done in a larger context.

To summarize, ditransitive verbs and constructions serve as an ideal conduit for investigating overt and covert argument realization. While in the conceptual structure,

three participants are involved in transfer events, in actual language use, speakers can choose to highlight or background the participants with varying informational-statuses by implicitly or explicitly expressing them as well as by ordering them in a certain way. Studying the argument realization pattern of ditransitive arguments within a discourse reveals the information structure in the language. The present study found that phonologically unsaturated fragments often occur in face-to-face interactions. Recoverability of unexpressed elements can be done by addressees given sufficient discourse information. The significant role that information structure plays in argument realization is difficult to be observed without discourse context, as the interrelationships among nominal objects go beyond clause boundary.

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