

**The Syntactic Analysis of Cantonese Negative SFP *Mei6* in Yes/No Questions
and Its Implications for Language Acquisition**

Paul Law

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The paper investigates the syntactic structure of yes/no questions with sfp *mei6* in Cantonese. It systematically compares it with negation *mei6* and supports the majority view that they are coordinate structures with deletion of the predicate in the second conjunct. It thus follows immediately that negative sentences with *mei6* and yes/no questions with sfp *mei6* should share some similarity, e.g., the implication that the event expressed by the sentence without *mei6* is expected to take place. Their differences on the negative sentences but not on the yes/no questions, e.g., aspectual restrictions, some apparent instrumental adjuncts, are not due to the two being different categories as suggested by Tang (2022), but can be resolved by a less stringent condition on deletion than what has heretofore been proposed. The deleted predicate need not be completely identical to the antecedent predicate. All that is required is that the head of the deleted predicate be the same as that of the antecedent predicate. The analysis affords a unified account of *mei6* and requires no assumption specific to yes/no questions or sfp *mei6*.

The implications for language acquisition are that yes/no questions with sfp *mei6* should emerge not later than the mastering of *mei6* in negative sentences, coordinate structures and predicate deletion. This is in sharp contrast with the prediction of the view that the two *mei6*s are different categories, for which they may be developed independently, i.e., negative *mei6* may emerge earlier or later than sfp *mei6*. Whether the prediction is borne out awaits future empirical study, however.