

## Preverbal *Dak1* in Cantonese

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### Abstract

This paper first considers and evaluates the previous literature which analysed preverbal *dak1* in Cantonese as a verb that selects a focalised nominal and a complement. It then improves the proposal by considering another analysis of preverbal *dak1* as a focus marker that restricts the quantity of a grammatical function selected from within the sentence, meaning ‘only’ or ‘only have’, while at the same time bringing attention to or emphasising the quantified phrase. This paper further investigates the function and quantification scope of preverbal *dak1*. By incorporating the Quantification Accessibility Hierarchy for Affixal Quantifiers which was previously applied to postverbal *dak1*, this paper argues that the quantification scope of preverbal *dak1* is consistent with postverbal *dak1*. Moreover, in situations where a postverbal *dak1* construction may have ambiguous interpretations between the modal reading of ‘can’ and the restrictive focus reading of ‘only’ or ‘only have’, the corresponding preverbal *dak1* construction always forces the restrictive focus reading. Overall, this paper shows that there is a constant form and function of preverbal *dak1* as a focus marker.

### Keywords

*dak1*, focus, focus marker, quantification accessibility, quantifier

### 1. Introduction

There is limited literature on the use of preverbal *dak1* 得 in Cantonese despite its relatively frequent occurrence. Preverbal *dak1* is used in Cantonese to “quantify”, meaning ‘only’ 只 or ‘only have’ 只有 (Luke 1999: 217; Yiu 2019). This meaning of *dak1* emerges via grammaticalisation, and is only seen in Cantonese but not in other Sinitic languages (Yiu 2019: 169, 173–176). Preverbal *dak1* can quantify a wide range of grammatical functions, including subject, the direct object, the indirect object, duration phrases, frequency phrases, locative phrases and temporal phrases (Tang 2000: 428–429; 2002: 281–282). The use of preverbal *dak1* in Cantonese is considered as more productive in terms of scope than *zhiyou* 只有 in Mandarin (see, e.g., Tsai 2004). Some example sentences are provided in examples (1) to (3) below. In particular, example (3) shows that preverbal *dak1* can also occur in a position other than the beginning of a sentence. It is therefore better named as “preverbal” *dak1* (or “clause-initial” *dak1*) rather than “sentence-initial” *dak1*.

- (1) 得 佢 會 幫 你。  
 Dak1 keoi3 wui6 bong1 nei5.  
 DAK 3SG will help you  
 ‘Only he/she will help you.’  
 (Lee 2019: 145)
- (2) 得 一個 男 先生 咋。  
 Dak1 jat1-go3 naam4 sin1sang1 zaa3.  
 DAK one-CL male teacher SFP  
 ‘There is only a male teacher.’  
 (Luke 1999: 217)
- (3) 我 知道 得 呢 幅 畫 小明 最 鍾意。  
 Ngo5 zi1dou6 dak1 ni1 fuk1 waa2 siu2ming4 zeoi3 zung1ji3.  
 1SG know DAK this CL drawing SiuMing most like  
 ‘I know (that) SiuMing only likes this drawing most.’  
 (Tang 2002: 284)

Previous analyses suggested that preverbal *dak1* should be classified as a verb (Tang 2000: 430–431; 2002: 289–291; 2015: 116fn29). However, these studies also recognised the purpose of *dak1* (whether preverbal or postverbal) is to express focus. Based on these two suggestions, preverbal *dak1* was analysed as a verb which selects a focalised nominal and a clause, which are in the specifier and complement position of the preverbal *dak1* respectively (Tang 2002: 292). However, some recent analyses have suggested that there is an inventory of focus in the left periphery of Cantonese, within which includes a *dak*-focus (Cheung 2015: 108–110). Under this view, *dak1* can be analysed as a focus marker, at least implicitly.<sup>1</sup> This may or may not be mutually exclusive to the analysis of *dak1* as a verb.

This paper answers two questions: (1) What should be the appropriate analysis of preverbal *dak1*? (2) How does preverbal *dak1* function to “quantify” a grammatical function with the meaning of ‘only’/‘only have’? Section 2 considers the first question and Section 3 considers the second question. Section 4 concludes.

<sup>1</sup> Cheung (2015: 108) considered that Tang (2002) had shown preverbal *dak1* “as a focus marker”, but that did not seem to accurately represent Tang’s views, given that Tang (2002: 303) clearly concluded that preverbal *dak1* “is a verb that introduces a focalised nominal”, and that preverbal *dak1* constructions can be derived by movement and can be treated on a par with clefts in English.

## 2. The analysis of preverbal *dak1*

The very few works that explicitly analysed preverbal *dak1* had presented very brief arguments. The only discussion that can be located are in Tang (2000: 430–431; 2002: 289–291), which concluded that preverbal *dak1* is a verb. Two identical arguments were provided in support of this conclusion. This section considers these two arguments in turn and provides some responses. It further sets out two other observations which might speak against the verbhood of preverbal *dak1*.

It must be said at the outset that none of these responses or observations establishes firmly against the analysis of preverbal *dak1* as a verb. The aim of this section is merely to evaluate the strength of the current arguments in the literature. Moreover, even if one rejects these comments and considers that preverbal *dak1* can be treated as a verb, this does not exclude the potential analysis of preverbal *dak1* as a focus marker. In fact, this paper suggests that these two analyses are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is argued that a complete analysis of preverbal *dak1* must also involve analysing it as a focus marker.

The first argument provided by Tang relates to the suffix *faan1* 翻, which is considered as a suffix that is only attached to verbs. As *faan1* can also be attached after preverbal *dak1*, preverbal *dak1* must therefore be a verb (Tang 2002: 289–290). The following example is provided to show the grammaticality of the combination *dak1-faan1*:

- (4) 得翻 百 幾 間 中學  
Dak1-faan1 baak3 gei2 gaan1 zung1hok6  
DAK-FAAN hundred something CL secondary.school  
可以用 英文 教學。  
ho2ji5 jung6 jing1man4 gaau3hok6.  
can use English teach

‘There is now only around one hundred something secondary schools which can use English to teach.’

(Tang 2000: 430; 2002: 290)

However, the meaning of *faan1* in example (4) seems to be different from *faan1* as a verbal suffix to mean restoring the original state of action or status (such as location and possession), such as those in examples (5) and (6):

- (5) 你 都 係 教翻 書 好。  
Nei5 dou1 hai6 gaau3-faan1 syu1 hou2.  
2SG also be teach-FAAN book good

‘For your own good, you should be returning to teaching.’

(modified from Tang 2015: 90)

- (6) 畀翻          十個          銀錢          過          佢。  
 Bei2-faan1    sap6-go3    ngan4cin4    gwo3    keoi5.  
 give-FAAN    ten-CL      money        pass      3SG  
 ‘Give him/her ten dollars back.’  
 (Tang 2015: 90)

In example (5), the original state of action is to teach, while in example (6), the original status is the possession of ten dollars by him/her. In both examples, *faan1* indicates a “restoration” to the original state of action or status (‘returning’ and ‘giving back’). However, *faan1* in example (4) seems to mean ‘mentally restoring the original state’ (意念上回復本有), an interpretation which is first discussed in Peng (1999: 66) and cited in Tang (2015: 91). This meaning of *faan1* concerns not so much with the concept of restoring the original state, but rather emphasises on the existing state which is fewer in terms of quantity than the original state (Tang 2015: 91). In other words, it is a comparison between the current situation and the previous situation, and in turn emphasises the (current) status quo where the quantity of the subject matter is fewer in number. In example (4), the emphasis is on the existing situation that there are only around one hundred something secondary schools which can use English to teach, and compares this situation (implicitly) with the original state where more than one hundred something secondary schools can use English to teach.

Consider another example of *dak1-faan1* such as example (7), where there is again a comparison between two states of events: the original state where I have more available time to read books, and the current state where I only have tomorrow to read books. The emphasis is on the more limited time that I currently have.

- (7) 得翻          聽日          我          可以          睇書。  
 Dak1-faan1    ting3jat6    ngo5    ho2ji5    tai2-syu1.  
 DAK-FAAN    tomorrow    1SG    can      look-book  
 ‘There is now only tomorrow when I can read books.’

The verbs that can be attached with *faan1* to express this meaning of ‘mental restoration’ like examples (4) and (7) are severely limited. The limited few verbs that are identified in the literature include *dak1*, *zing6* 剩 and *lau4* 留 (Peng 1996: 66; Tang 2015: 91). It is argued that this lack of productivity suggests that *faan1* in examples (4) and (7) are not used in the sense of verbal suffixes. Rather, phrases like *dak1-faan1* are fixed combinations that are used to (implicitly) compare between two events or states, and emphasise the current situation which involves a smaller quantity of the subject matter. As seen in examples (4A) and (7A), the lack of *faan1* strips away the sense of comparison which examples (4) and (7) have.

- (4A) 得 百 幾 間 中學  
Dak1 baak3 gei2 gaan1 zung1hok6  
DAK hundred something CL secondary.school  
可以用 英文 教學。  
ho2ji5 jung6 jing1man4 gaau3hok6.  
can use English teach  
'Only around one hundred something secondary schools can use English to teach.'
- (7A) 得 聽日 我 可以 睇書。  
Dak1 ting3jat6 ngo5 ho2ji5 tai2-syu1.  
DAK tomorrow 1SG can look-book  
'I can read books only at tomorrow.'

Analysed as such, *faan1* in *dak1-faan1* should be treated differently than the verbal suffix *faan1*, as it has the meaning of 'mental restoration' or comparison rather than the meaning of restoring the original state of action or status as seen in the verbal suffix *faan1*. Therefore, the point that *dak1* can be attached with *faan1* does not provide a definitive view that preverbal *dak1* is a verb.

The second argument provided by Tang concerns with the meaning of *dak1* in the verb position. Tang (2000: 431; 2002: 290–291) considered that *dak1* in the verb position can be used as a verb which means 'only'/'only have'. Therefore, it was argued that preverbal *dak1* should also be seen as a verb that means 'only'/'only have'. The following two sentences are provided to support this argument:

- (8) 我 得 十五 分鐘。  
Ngo5 dak1 sap6ng5 fan1zung1.  
1SG DAK fifteen minutes  
點 可以 講 晒 篇 文 呀?  
Dim2 ho2ji5 gong2 saai3 pin1 man4 aa1?  
how can talk all CL passage SFP  
'I only have fifteen minutes. How can I talk through the whole passage?'  
(Tang 2000: 430; 2002: 291) (punctuation as original)
- (9) 佢 得 把 口。  
Keoi5 dak1 baa2 hau2.  
3SG DAK CL mouth  
'He/She is all mouth (and no trousers/action).' (lit. 'He/she only has a mouth.')

(Tang 2000: 430; 2002: 291)

While both *dak1* in examples (8) and (9) seem to be in the verb position<sup>2</sup> and have a meaning of ‘only’/‘only have’, they should be seen as indicating relationships such as existence and possession (Yiu 2019: 165, 168). Moreover, looking solely at what *dak1* means as a verb does not provide a solid basis to analyse preverbal *dak1* as a verb, as preverbal *dak1* may or may not adopt these usages of *dak1* as a verb.

There are two further diagnostics or observations which might speak against preverbal *dak1* as a verb. The first observation relates to the diagnostic that most Cantonese verbs are able to form questions through the V-NEG-V structure. While it is recognised that this does not apply to all Cantonese verbs, the inability of preverbal *dak1* to form such V-NEG-V questions like example (10b) might speak against its verbhood.

- (10) a. 得 三個 鐘 你 可以 瞓。  
 Dak1 saam1-go3 zung1 nei5 ho2ji5 fan3.  
 DAK three-CL hour 2SG can sleep  
 ‘You can sleep for only three hours.’
- b. \*得 唔 得 三個 鐘 你 可以 瞓？  
 Dak1 m4 dak1 saam1-go3 zung1 nei5 ho2ji5 fan3?  
 DAK NEG DAK three-CL hour 2SG can sleep  
 (Intended meaning: ‘Can you sleep for only three hours, or for not only three hours?’)  
 (Tang 2002: 282)

The second observation uses the following example (11) which is a simple construction with preverbal *dak1*:

- (11) 得 我 發表 意見。  
 Dak1 ngo5 faat3biu2 ji3gin3.  
 DAK 1SG express opinion  
 ‘Only I express opinions.’  
 (Tang 2002: 281)

Excluding the preverbal *dak1*, example (11) is a simple Cantonese sentence following the default SVO order, where *ngo5* ‘I’ is the subject, *faat3biu2* ‘express’ is the verb and *ji3gin3* ‘opinion’ is the object. If preverbal *dak1* is to be analysed as a verb, then example (11)

<sup>2</sup> It might also be said that the verbal status of *dak1* is not clearly shown in examples (8) and (9): example (8) may be considered as an improperly split sentence, where the first part of it (*ngo5 dak1 sap6ng5 fan1zung1*) cannot form a grammatical sentence on its own, while example (9) is an idiomatic phrase.

will have two verbs: *dak1* and *faat3biu2*. However, constructions like these have not been analysed so far as either a serial verb construction (Matthews & Yip 2011: 160–167) or a verb fronting structure (Matthews & Yip 2011: 88–89). It is therefore difficult to pin down the proper grammatical analysis of these sentences with two “verbs”. On the other hand, if *dak1* is a focus marker which indicates the focus *ngo5* (as suggested below), then example (11) can be explained based on focus fronting or movement to a focus phrase (FocP).

The discussion above provides some responses and comments as to why analysing preverbal *dak1* as a verb may not be adequate or satisfactory. This paper advances an improved proposal that argues for analysing preverbal *dak1* as a focus marker. The definition in Wakefield (2020: 131) of a “focus marker” is adopted:

“... a focus marker selects something from within the sentence and brings attention to it, emphasizing it or ... restricting its amount or degree, but the discourse-based reason for this focus is figured out pragmatically – it is not expressed by the focus marker itself.”

More specifically, preverbal *dak1* is a focus marker that restricts the quantity of a grammatical function selected from within the sentence, meaning ‘only’/‘only have’. Moreover, preverbal *dak1* gives “presentational focus” by (in Wakefield’s words) bringing attention to or emphasising the quantified phrase. Despite the seeming novelty of this analysis, it is actually consistent with the observations in Tang (2000, 2002) that preverbal *dak1* shows focus, as well as more recent cartographic approaches that take *dak1*-focus as part of the inventory of focus in Cantonese (together with *lin4*-focus) (see, e.g., Cheung 2015). In other grammatical frameworks which assume an independent and autonomous tier of information structure (such as Lexical Functional Grammar), preverbal *dak1* can be neatly accounted as introducing a focalised nominal which can appear as a value of the FOCUS attribute in the information structure (see, e.g., Dalrymple et al. 2019: 377–380; Lui 2022: 265–282).

### 3. The function and quantification scope of preverbal *dak1*

As preverbal *dak1* is to “quantify” (Luke 1999: 217), it is therefore naturally associated with quantity. It is clear that the focalised element of preverbal *dak1* must be a nominal phrase (Tang 2002: 284). This is also understood as the [+Q(antity)] feature in Lee (2019: 156). This section follows from the discussion in Section 2 above by considering the mechanism in which preverbal *dak1* functions as a focus marker to restrict the quantity of a grammatical function. This section focuses on the question of how does preverbal *dak1* selects the correct quantification scope.

This paper argues that preverbal *dak1* consistently selects its quantification scope in the same way as postverbal *dak1* does. Lee (2012, 2019) proposed that the quantification scope of postverbal *dak1*, as an affixal quantifier, can be analysed based on the Quantification Accessibility Hierarchy for Affixal Quantifiers (QAH). The QAH states (Lee 2012: 110):

“When there is more than one item in the sentence which satisfies the selectional restriction of an affixal quantifier, the item that occupies a higher position in the following hierarchy would be preferred over the item in a lower position for the selection of the quantifier.

DO / IO direct arguments > IO indirect arguments (with covert or overt dative markers) / post-verbal PPs > pre-verbal PPs > subjects > predicates

where ‘x > y’ means that x is more accessible the affixal quantifier than y, when both x and y satisfy the selectional restriction of the quantifier in question.”

We now consider several examples which shows that the QAH applies for both postverbal *dak1* and preverbal *dak1*. Before proceeding, a caveat should be made: the analysis below does not imply that for every construction with *dak1*, there are equivalent and separate constructions with preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1*. The examples below are merely to show the similarities in the quantification scope of preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1*.

Examples (12a) and (12b) are two examples with postverbal *dak1*. In example (12a), there is only one phrase with a defined quantity ([+Q]), that is, the frequency phrase *loeng5ci3* ‘twice’. The postverbal *dak1* therefore selects this phrase and quantifies it with the meaning of ‘only’/‘only have’. This results in the interpretation of ‘only twice’. In example (12b), there are two phrases with [+Q], the direct object *jat1-go3 jan4* ‘one person’ and the frequency phrase *loeng5ci3* ‘twice’. By the operation of the QAH, the direct object is preferred over the frequency phrase (which is syntactically on par with an IO indirect argument). The postverbal *dak1* therefore selects the direct object and quantifies it with the meaning of ‘only’/‘only have’. This results in the interpretation of ‘only one person’. The frequency phrase does not receive the quantified interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A reviewer suggested that a “double restrictive” interpretation is also possible for example (12b): ‘I have visited only one person only twice.’ This is not a common interpretation in the author’s understanding, and it is argued that this is not the correct interpretation. The most natural expression with a “double restrictive” interpretation is to have two *dak1*s with one of them fronted, like example (16) with the (16i) interpretation.



- (12) a. 我 探得 佢 兩次。  
N<sub>go5</sub> taam3-dak1 keoi5 loeng5ci3.  
1SG visit-DAK 3SG twice  
'I have visited him/her only twice.'  
(Lee 2019: 156)
- b. 我 探得 一個 人 兩次。  
N<sub>go5</sub> taam3-dak1 jat1-go3 jan4 loeng5ci3.  
1SG visit-DAK one-CL person twice  
'I have visited only one person twice.'  
(Lee 2019: 156)

We now derive two preverbal *dak1* constructions based on example (12b). Example (12c) puts *dak1* and the direct object *jat1-go3 jan4* in the preverbal position. Example (12d) puts *dak1* and the frequency phrase *loeng5ci3* in the preverbal position.

- (12) c. 得 一個 人 我 探 (咗) 兩次。  
Dak1 jat1-go3 jan4 ngo5 taam3(-zo2) loeng5ci3.  
DAK one-CL person 1SG visit(-PFV) twice  
'Only one person, I have visited twice.'
- d. \* 得 兩次 我 探 (咗) 一個 人。  
Dak1 loeng5ci3 ngo5 taam3(-zo2) jat1-go3 jan4.  
DAK twice 1SG visit(-PFV) one-CL person  
(Intended meaning: 'Only twice, I have visited one person.')

Recall in example (12b) that based on the QAH, the postverbal *dak1* selects the direct object as the restricted candidate. Example (12c) places preverbal *dak1* with this restricted candidate. Example (12c) is therefore grammatical and receives the same interpretation of 'only one person' as example (12b). The preverbal *dak1* in example (12c) further shows "presentational focus" by emphasising the limited quantity of person that the speaker has visited. On the other hand, example (12d) attempts to place preverbal *dak1* with an incorrect restricted candidate, that is, the frequency phrase. Example (12d) is therefore ungrammatical and does not receive the interpretation of 'only twice' as intended. As the sentence is ungrammatical, there can apparently be no "presentational focus" as well.

Examples (13a) and (13b) are another two examples with postverbal *dak1*. In example (13a), there is only one phrase with a defined quantity ([+Q]), that is, the direct object *bun3 wun2 faan6* 'half a bowl of rice'. The postverbal *dak1* therefore selects this phrase and quantifies it with the meaning of 'only'/'only have'. This results in the interpretation of 'only half a bowl of rice'. In example (13b), there are no [+Q] phrases, because *sing4 wun2*

*faan6* ‘whole bowl of rice’ does not have a defined quantity and is [-Q]. By the operation of the QAH, the remaining possible restricted candidate is the predicate. The postverbal *dak1* therefore selects the whole verbal predicate. When this occurs, the result is not a restrictive focus reading, but a modal reading of ‘can’. Example (13b) therefore receives the modal interpretation of ‘can eat’.

- (13) a. 佢 嚟日 食得 半 碗 飯。  
 Keoi3 cam4jat6 sik6-dak1 bun3 wun2 faan6.  
 3SG yesterday eat-DAK half bowl rice  
 ‘He/She ate only half a bowl of rice yesterday.’  
 (modified from Lee 2019: 158)
- b. 佢 食得 成 碗 飯。  
 Keoi3 sik6-dak1 sing4 wun2 faan6.  
 3SG eat-DAK whole bowl rice  
 ‘He/She can eat the whole/entire bowl of rice.’  
 (modified from Lee 2019: 158)

We now derive two preverbal *dak1* constructions based on examples (13a) and (13b). Example (13c) modifies example (13a) by putting *dak1* and the direct object ([+Q]) *bun3 wun2 faan6* in the preverbal position. Example (13d) modifies example (13b) by putting *dak1* and the direct object ([-Q]) *sing4 wun2 faan6* ‘whole bowl of rice’ in the preverbal position.

- (13) c. 得 半 碗 飯 佢 嚟日 食咗。  
 Dak1 bun3 wun2 faan6 keoi3 cam4jat6 sik6-zo2.  
 DAK half bowl rice 3SG yesterday eat-PFV  
 ‘Only half a bowl of rice, he/she ate yesterday.’
- d. \*得 成 碗 飯 佢 食。  
 Dak1 sing4 wun2 faan6 keoi3 sik6.  
 DAK whole bowl rice 3SG eat  
 (Intended meaning: ‘He/She can eat the whole/entire bowl of rice.’)

Recall in example (13a) that based on the QAH, the direct object is the restricted candidate. Example (13c) places preverbal *dak1* with this restricted candidate. Example (13c) is therefore grammatical and receives the same interpretation of ‘only half a bowl of rice’ like example (13a). The preverbal *dak1* in example (13c) further shows “presentational focus” by emphasising the limited quantity of rice that he/she ate yesterday. On the other hand, in example (13b), the predicate is the restricted candidate, which results in a modal interpretation. Example (13d) attempts to place preverbal *dak1* with an invalid restricted

candidate, that is, the direct object. Example (13d) is therefore ungrammatical and does not receive either the restrictive focus or the modal reading. As the sentence is ungrammatical, there can apparently be no “presentational focus” as well.

The above two sets of examples show that preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1* are consistent in terms of their behaviour of quantification scope. We now turn to the third and fourth sets of examples, which shows that in cases where there may be ambiguous readings or interpretations of postverbal *dak1*, the use of preverbal *dak1* always rejects the modal reading predicted by the QAH and forces a restrictive focus reading.

In example (14a), there is a postverbal *dak1*, but there are no [+Q] phrases. By the operation of the QAH, the remaining possible restricted candidate is the predicate. The postverbal *dak1* therefore selects the whole verbal predicate. The QAH predicts a modal reading of ‘can’ in (14aii) instead of a restrictive focus reading of ‘only’/‘only have’ in (14ai). Example (14a) therefore receives the modal reading (14aii) as the preferred interpretation. The restrictive focus reading (14ai) is only possible if focus is placed on the direct object based on Rooth’s Alternative Semantics (Lee 2019: 161).

- (14) a. 我 食得 呢 碗 飯。  
Ngo5 sik6-dak1 nei1 wun2 faan6.  
1SG eat-DAK this bowl rice  
(i) ‘I eat only this bowl of rice.’  
(ii) ‘I am able to eat this bowl of rice.’  
(Lee 2019: 160)

However, as shown in examples (14b) and (14c), the corresponding preverbal *dak1* constructions receive the restrictive focus reading instead of the modal reading. This fact cannot be explained by the QAH. This paper argues that this is a special feature of preverbal *dak1*. In sentences with postverbal *dak1* where ambiguous interpretations are possible, preverbal *dak1* rejects the modal reading predicted by the QAH and forces the restrictive focus reading.

- (14) b. 得 呢 碗 飯 食。  
Dak1 nei1 wun2 faan6 sik6.  
DAK this bowl rice eat  
‘(There is) only this bowl of rice to eat.’  
c. 我 得 呢 碗 飯 食。  
Ngo5 dak1 nei1 wun2 faan6 sik6.  
1SG DAK this bowl rice eat  
‘I only have this bowl of rice to eat.’

It is further observed that in modern Cantonese, in addition to postverbal *dak1* constructions without [+Q] phrases, some postverbal *dak1* constructions with [+Q] phrases also show ambiguity between the restrictive focus and the modal readings. An example is example (15a), where both the restrictive focus reading (15ai) and the modal reading (15aii) are possible. The QAH selects the [+Q] direct object *saam1 wun2 faan6* ‘three bowls of rice’ and predicts that the restrictive focus reading (15ai) is the only possible interpretation. However, in an appropriate context, the modal reading (15aii) is also found to be possible.

- (15) a. 我 食得 三 碗 飯。  
 Ngo5 sik6-dak1 saam1 wun2 faan6.  
 1SG eat-DAK three bowl rice  
 (i) ‘I eat only three bowls of rice.’  
 (ii) ‘I am able to eat three bowls of rice.’  
 (Luke 1999: 218)

Similarly, the corresponding preverbal *dak1* constructions in examples (15b) and (15c) remove this ambiguity and force the restrictive focus reading. Again, this is due to the special feature of preverbal *dak1* discussed above.

- (15) b. 得 三 碗 飯 食。  
 Dak1 saam1 wun2 faan6 sik6.  
 DAK three bowl rice eat  
 ‘(There are) only three bowls of rice to eat.’  
 c. 我 得 三 碗 飯 食。  
 Ngo5 dak1 saam1 wun2 faan6 sik6.  
 1SG DAK three bowl rice eat  
 ‘I only have three bowls of rice to eat.’

To summarise the comparison between the quantification scope of preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1*, there are significant similarities between them. Preverbal *dak1* can only quantify phrases which a postverbal *dak1* would have been able to quantify as well based on the QAH. Preverbal *dak1* further shows “presentational focus” of the “correct” restricted candidate as determined by the QAH. Preverbal *dak1* cannot quantify, restrict, or focalise an invalid or incorrect candidate. In situations where there may be ambiguous interpretations between the modal reading and the restrictive focus reading due to the absence of [+Q] phrases, such as those in examples (14a) and (15a), preverbal *dak1* rejects the modal reading predicted by the QAH and forces the restrictive focus reading, as seen in examples (14b) to (14c) and examples (15b) to (15c).

Before concluding this paper, one may briefly consider the co-occurrence of preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1*, such as those in example (16). Similar to example (15) with postverbal *dak1* and [+Q] phrases, there is an ambiguity in example (16) between two possible interpretations: the “double restrictive” interpretation (16i) and the “restrictive and modal” interpretation (16ii). In particular, the latter (16ii) interpretation goes against the QAH, which selects the [+Q] direct object *jat1 wun2 faan6* ‘one bowl of rice’ and predicts that example (16) only receives the “double restrictive” interpretation (16i).

- (16) 得 我 食 得 一 碗 飯。  
Dak1 ngo5 sik6 dak1 jat1 wun2 faan6.  
DAK 1SG eat DAK one bowl rice  
(i) ‘Only I eat only a bowl of rice.’  
(ii) ‘Only I can eat a bowl of rice.’

A comprehensive analysis of these constructions with the co-occurrence of preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1* will have to be deferred to future research. It will be interesting to see how a formal analysis can fully capture the contrast between preverbal *dak1* and postverbal *dak1*. However, this paper wishes to make one observation based on the argument above, namely that preverbal *dak1* is always to quantify and always forces a restrictive focus reading despite the QAH might have predicted otherwise. The observation is this. The two interpretations (16i) and (16ii) both see the (first) preverbal *dak1* as restrictive: ‘only I’. It is the (second) postverbal *dak1* which is open for ambiguity. This shows yet again that the preverbal *dak1* is restrictive in nature and forces a restrictive focus reading whenever appropriate. In fact, in example (17) where the second postverbal *dak1* is also preposed to a preverbal position, the modal reading is indeed no longer possible. The only available interpretation is the “double restrictive” interpretation.

- (17) 得 我 得 一 碗 飯 食。  
Dak1 ngo5 dak1 jat1 wun2 faan6 sik6.  
DAK 1SG DAK one bowl rice eat  
‘Only I eat only a bowl of rice.’ (lit. ‘Only I, only a bowl of rice, eat.’)  
#‘Only I can eat a bowl of rice.’

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper presents arguments and observations which demonstrate that the previous analysis of preverbal *dak1* as a verb may not be complete or even accurate. This paper proposes and argues that a complete analysis of preverbal *dak1* must also involve analysing it as a focus

marker that restricts the quantity of a grammatical function selected from within the sentence, meaning ‘only’ or ‘only have’, while at the same time bringing attention to or emphasising the quantified phrase. Such selection of quantification scope is based on the QAH, and is consistent with that for postverbal *dak1*. Preverbal *dak1* further shows “presentational focus” of the restricted candidate. In situations where postverbal *dak1* may lead to ambiguous interpretations between the modal reading and the restrictive focus reading, preverbal *dak1* always forces the restrictive focus reading.

As is evident from the discussion above, the issue of *dak1* is an interesting but apparently not an easy one. One can only echo with the concluding remarks in Tang (2002: 303–304) that much research work remains to be completed.

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## 粵語動詞前置“得”

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### 提要

過往文獻把粵語動詞前置“得”分析為動詞。本文首先考慮並評價該等文獻。本文改善該建議，主張動詞前置“得”也可分析為焦點標記，其作用是限制從句子中選擇的一項語法成分的數量，表示“只、只有”義，並同時提醒注意或強調該量化詞組。本文進一步研究動詞前置“得”的作用及量化範圍。本文認為動詞前置“得”和動詞後置“得”的量化範圍是一致的。再者，動詞前置“得”結構在某些可能出現歧義的情況下，定必選取限制性詮釋。

### 關鍵詞

“得”，焦點，焦點標記，量化可及性，量化詞

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