Cantonese Neg-wh-quantifiers (Neg-whQ):
A Syntactic Account in Comparative Grammar

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Abstract

This paper looks at a kind of colloquial phrases in Cantonese, the proposed negative wh-quantifier ('Neg-whQ'), at syntax and semantics interface. Neg-whQs have the form [*mou* 'no' + *wh*-word]. Instead of a canonical SVO order, an Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ uniquely manifests an SOV order and is variously interpreted as negative 'nothing' or existential 'only a few'. Neg-WhQs do appear in subject position in Mandarin Chinese and as *nowhere* in English, however, such SOV word order of Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ constructions is absent. This study discusses the overt movement phenomenon object Neg-whQs embody in a feature-based approach and accounts for the dual interpretation of Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ constructions.

1. Introduction

This paper looks at the little-studied negative *wh*-quantifiers (Neg-whQ), which is a type of *wh*-quantifier, in which their morphological composition involves the combination of a negative morpheme *mou* and a *wh*-phrase in Cantonese. Neg-WhQs have two possible interpretations depending on the context, namely the negative reading and existential 'only a few' reading, as exemplified in (1-2).

(1)　mou-matje
　　　no-what
　　　'nothing' / 'only a few things'

(2)　mou-bingo
　　　no-who
　　　'no-one' / 'only a few people'

While SVO is the canonical word order in Cantonese, a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction observes an SOV structure. Nonetheless, Neg-whQs *mou-matje* 'no+what', *mou-bingo* 'no+who' and *mou-bindou* 'no+where' are ambiguous in having both the negative and existential 'only a few' reading. Such object raising phenomenon resulting in an SOV word order is an exceptional case limited to only object Neg-WhQs and ordinary negative quantifiers (NegQ). While object topicalisation OSV and subject right dislocation VOS are possible structures as a result of scrambling, SOV is in general disallowed with any other object phrases. Example (3) illustrates a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction with a neutral sentence particle (SP).

(3) Ngo   *mou-matje*   zungji   wo3.
     I   no-what   like   SP
     a. 'I like nothing.'
     b. 'I like only a few things.'

The existential 'only a few' reading is referred to as 'hardly any' or 'any-much' reading in Yip and Matthew's data (2000).

2. Cross-linguistic variation

Neg-whQs do appear in the same morphological form, either as a subject in Mandarin Chinese (MC) and either as a subject or an object in English. When Neg-whQs appear in the subject position however, they have only negative interpretation in Cantonese, MC and English. Neg-WhQs and NegQs are semantically equivalent in this case.

(4) *Mou*-bingo/ *moujan*   zungji   ngo.   [Cantonese]
     No-who   / nobody   like   me
     'Nobody likes me.'
(5) *Meiyou-shei*/ *meiyouren*   xihuan   wo.   [MC]
     No-who   / nobody   like   me
     'Nobody likes me.'
(6) Nowhere is home.   [English]

However, a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ is semantically distinctive from a NegQ$_{obj}$, even they both appear in an SOV word order in Cantonese.

(7)　Ngo　*mou-matje*$_i$　　　soeng　sik *t*$_i$.

　　　I　　no-what　　　want　eat

　　　a. 'I want to eat nothing.'

　　　b. 'I want to eat only a few things.'

(8)　Ngo　*mou-je*　　　soeng　sik *t*$_i$.

　　　I　　nothing　　　want　eat

　　　'I want to eat nothing.'

A Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ is obliged to appear in a derived SOV structure in Cantonese as in (7), contrary to the canonical SVO order, as a result of overt movements involved. In contrast, the Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ equivalents in MC and English cannot appear in an SOV order and therefore the Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ in (9-10) leads to the ungrammaticality.

(9)　*Wo　*meiyou-shenme*$_i$　xiang　　chi *t*$_i^1$　　　　　　　　　　[MC]

　　　 I　　no-what　　　　want　　eat

　　　*'I want to eat nothing.'

(10) *I *nowhere* want to go.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[English]

Unlike Neg-whQ in Cantonese, the object *nowhere* in English has a negative interpretation and does not obligatorily surface in preverbal position as in (11).

(11) This road leads to *nowhere*.

　　　The major difference in terms of Neg-WhQs in the comparative grammars lies in the properties of *wh*-phrases as a crucial component of Neg-whQs in forming them as *wh*-

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1　Alternatively, the *wh*-word staying in-situ is licensed as an indefinite by a preceding negative morpheme *meiyou* and renders grammaticality.

　　(i)　Wo　　*meiyou*　xiang　chi　　*shenme*.

　　　　I　　　no　　want　　eat　　what

　　　　'I don't want to eat anything.' (Lit. 'I want to eat nothing.')

quantifiers. We will see that the differences among Neg-WhQs in Cantonese, MC and English are comparable to their differences in their *wh*-phrases/words. Unlike *wh*-words in English, the [+/-Q] feature of Chinese *wh*-words (both Cantonese and MC) is morphologically realized through elements in other parts of the sentence but not as a part of the *wh*-word itself. Chinese *wh*-words are triggered as indefinites under a licensing relationship with licensers (see Huang 1982, Cheng 1984, Progovac 1988, Cheng 1991, 1994, Li 1992, Lin 1998, 2004). That is, Chinese *wh*-words bear an unvalued (uninterpretable) [Q] feature and also [*u*Quant] which could possibly license them as indefinites (e.g. existential quantifiers, universal quantifiers, etc.).

Apart from being licensed as indefinites, Cheung's (2009) survey claimed that *wh*-expressions are interpreted as negative proposition cross-linguistically. *Bindou* 'where' in Cantonese and *since when* in English are *wh*-expressions having a negative meaning and are referred as the Negative *WH* construction (Cheung 2006, 2009). As for the distribution of NWHs, the negative interpretation of these NWHs can only be maintained in pre-modal position and usually the presence of a sentence final particle (Cheung 2006).

(12) Koei bindou jau   hai   tousyugun   sik   je   aa3?!
     He   where   have be.at library   eat   thing SP
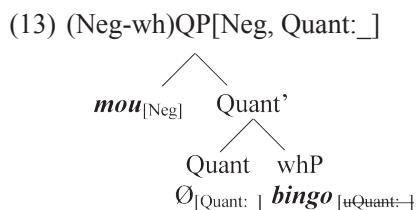   'No way did he eat anything in the library.'   (Cheung 2009: 298)

The negative interpretation of the *wh*-word within a Neg-whQ is possibly triggered in pre-modal position, hence, this ties a close relationship of a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ in a pre-verbal position and the possible additional existential 'only a few' reading that is unique in Cantonese.[2] The properties of *wh*-phrases being licensed as indefinites and NWHs lay a fundamental background to the syntactic proposal to be discussed in the next section.

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[2] Neg-whQ's dual interpretation is determined by the embedded [*u*Neg] property of the *wh*-word within a Neg-whQ, which is activated when it occurs in a pre-modal position and in the presence of SPs. Although Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese *wh*-words can exist in Negative *WH* Construction (NWHC) (Cheung 2006, 2009), a wider range of shorten/simplified *wh*-forms in Cantonese functions as a negative operator in pre-verbal position, such as *bin(dou)* 'where', *dim* 'how' and *me* 'what', whereas it appears to be limited to only *na(r)* 'where' in Mandarin Chinese. Hence, the nature of *wh*-words in the two languages can be fundamentally different leading to the parametric variation of Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction. In addition, the parametric variation between the two can also be explained that Cantonese as a colloquial language is subject to scrambling and therefore, the restriction on movable elements is looser compared to Mandarin Chinese as a formal language.

3. The proposal

Neg-WhQs as a type of *wh*-quantifier is proposed to be internally more complex than other NegQs such as *moujan* and *nowhere* in English. As Lewis (1975) and Heim (1982) suggest, the crucial *wh*-phrases being licensed as indefinites have no inherent quantification force, rather, they need a trigger in order to be licensed. This study follows the *wh*-operator movement approach that accounts for the Chinese *wh*-in-situ phenomenon, and the proposal that Neg-WhQs are a result of merge {mou {Ø, bingo}}.

Neg-WhQs are morphologically composed of the negative morpheme *mou*, an unpronounced quantifier operator Ø and a *wh*-phrase, as shown in the following Neg-whQ-phrase structure (Lee 2014):

(13) (Neg-wh)QP[Neg, Quant:_]

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{(Neg-wh)QP[Neg, Quant:\_]} \\
\diagup \diagdown \\
\textbf{\textit{mou}}_{[\text{Neg}]} \quad \text{Quant'} \\
\diagup \diagdown \\
\text{Quant} \quad \text{whP} \\
\text{Ø}_{[\text{Quant:\_}]} \quad \textbf{\textit{bingo}}_{[\text{uQuant:\_}]}
\end{array}
$$

Neg-whQs have a complex structure, in which *mou* is the specifier, the invisible quantifier operator Ø is the head and any *wh*-phrase is the complement. *Wh*-phrases in Cantonese have unspecified features as quantifiers, which require triggers, and the [uQuant] feature is checked in the proposed structure. In contrast, their closest counterpart *nowhere* in English has a simpler internal structure of merge of {no, where}. Neg-WhQs inherit both [Neg] and [Quant:_] features and account for the dual interpretation in a feature-based approach.

Neg-WhQs, like other negative phrases, can be decomposed into negation and an existential/indefinite element (Kratzer 1995, Potts 2000). Therefore, two pre-Spell-Out mechanisms are assumed along the line of the proposed structure in (13), namely the overt movement and decomposition. The dual interpretation is accounted for based on the scenarios that either the former takes place before the latter, or vice versa. The following table summarises the similarities and differences of object Neg-whQs between the three languages.

Table 1 Comparison of object negative wh-quantifiers in Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese and English

Language	Cantonese	Mandarin Chinese	English
Examples	*mou-bingo* ('no-who'), *mou-matje* ('no-what'), *mou-bindou* ('no-where')	*Meiyou-shei* ('no-one'), *meiyou-shenme* ('nothing'), *meiyou-na(r)* ('nowhere')	*nowhere,* **no-what,* **no-who*
Syntactic Features	[Neg] [Quant:_]	[Neg]	[Neg]
Word Order	Neg-whQ$_{subj}$ - V - O S- Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ - V	Neg-whQ$_{subj}$ - V - O *S- Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ - V	SVO *SOV
Movement	Overt	Overt[3]	Covert
Interpretation(s)	Negative/ existential 'only a few'	Negative	Negative

In contrast with Neg-WhQs, Mandarin Chinese Neg-whQs and English *nowhere* have a simpler structure as a result of merge {no, who/NP}. Therefore, the additional [Quant:_] feature rendering an SOV word order and additional existential reading are unique in Cantonese NegwhQs.
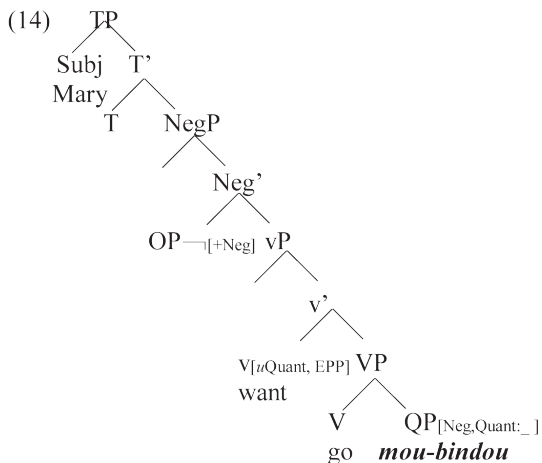
4. Accounting for the overt movement phenomenon

This section looks at the possible movement involved in order to account for the exceptional SOV word order and the dual interpretation of Neg-whQs$_{obj}$ in the next section under a feature-based account. Since the canonical word order is SVO, all objects, including Neg-whQs, are base-generated in the canonical object position.

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[3] In accounting for any constructions where *wh*-words being licensed as indefinites, this study is more towards the *wh*-operator movement account in overt syntax. Although Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ in Mandarin Chinese does not appear in pre-verbal position, other *wh*-quantifiers$_{obj}$ with overt quantifying operator (Ø) do appear in SOV structure in (ii) and overt movement is supposed to account for that.
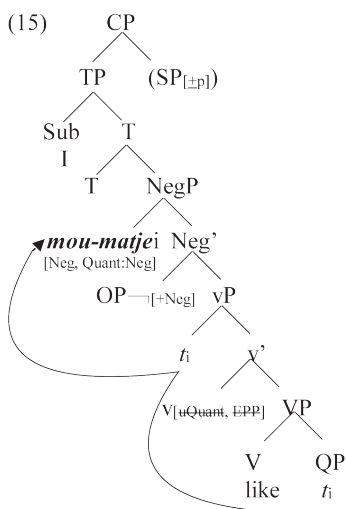
(ii) Ta   *shenme*$_i$ **dou**   ai   chi   *t*$_i$.
       He   what   Ø 'also' love   eat
       'He loves to eat everything.'

The syntactic derivation before any movement is as follows:

(14)

```
        TP
       /  \
     Subj  T'
     Mary  / \
          T   NegP
               \
               Neg'
               / \
          OP⌐[+Neg] vP
                     \
                     v'
                    /  \
          V[uQuant, EPP]  VP
              want       / \
                        V   QP[Neg,Quant:_ ]
                        go  mou-bindou
```

Neg-WhQs inherit both [Neg] and [Quant:_] features, which drive raising by matching probes and goals under Agree (Chomsky 2000). They undergo overt moving to a preverbal position and possibly further successive raising in a syntactically more complex structure (e.g bi-clausal sentences), that is triggered by uninterpretable and EPP features, resulting in SOV order.

The [uQuant] and EPP feature are active probes on v triggering movement of the Neg-whQ$_{obj}$. The probe v searches down its c-command domain and attracts *mou-bindou* for feature checking, valuing, and deletion. The representation in (15) in the following shows the pre-Spell-Out movements involved in a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction.

(15)

```
              CP
             /  \
           TP   (SP[±p])
          /  \
        Sub   T
         I   / \
            T   NegP
               /   \
       mou-matjei   Neg'
       [Neg, Quant:Neg] / \
                  OP⌐[+Neg]  vP
                            /  \
                          ti    V'
                               / \
                      V[uQuant, EPP]  VP
                              / \
                             V   QP
                            like  ti
```

A Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ moves obligatorily to a preverbal position to satisfy the [uQuant] and EPP feature (Chomsky 1995).[4] The feature [Quant:_] is valued with a semantic [Neg] feature from Neg^0 as a result of the NegP projection, suppose [Quant: Neg] after valuation, and grants Neg-whQ a negative interpretation. I take into account Beghelli and Stowell's location of the five QP-types, whereby a Neg-whQ accords to NQP and "checks [+Neg] in Spec of NegP, under agreement with the Neg-operator in Neg^0" (1997: 8). The SOV word order of Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ is therefore accounted for.

Apart from the obligatory raising from the base-generated object position to a preverbal position, Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ undergoes optional further raising in bi-clausal sentences.

(16) Nei   *mou-bingo$_i$*   gin-guo t_i.
     You   no-who   meet-ASP
     'You met nobody.'

(17) Ngo   *mou-bingo$_i$*   gotdak t_i nei t_i zungji t_i.
     I   no-who   think   you   like
     'I don't think you like anybody.'

It is arguable that Neg-whQs$_{obj}$ in SOV orders could be the outcome of the *wh*-word$_{obj}$ being moved to attach to the negative morpheme *mou* instead of being base-generated in the object position, as the literature suggests that negative heads are typically filled by negative morpheme and should be base-generated in Neg-head. However, it is evident from the following constructions that *mou* and the *wh*-word undergo successive movements as one constituent, resulting from topicalisation and optional clefting corresponding to the focus. Hence, this study follows the argument that Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ is base-generated in the canonical object position throughout.

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[4]   Following Diesing's (1992) view, strong quantifiers must undergo obligatory QR mapping into the restrictive clause at LF, in which strong quantifiers involve a presuppositional reading. The Neg-whQ in Cantonese is believed to be a kind of strong quantifier parallel to other strong quantifiers, which undergo obligatory raising in the syntax. Other strong quantifiers like negative quantifiers and universal quantifiers are exemplified in the following.

    (iii)   Ngo   *mou-je*   sik-guo.
        I   no-thing   eat-ASP
        'I have eaten nothing.'

    (iv)   Mary   *sojau-deifong*   dou   soeng   heoi.
        Mary   every-place   all   want   go
        'Mary wants to go everywhere.'

(18) *Mou-matje*ᵢ　　ze1,　　ngo *t*ᵢ　maai-zo　　　　*t*ᵢ.
　　　No-what_obj　　SP　　I　　　buy-ASP
　　　a. 'I bought nothing.'
　　　b. 'I only bought a few things.'

(19) *Mou-bindou*ᵢ　haai　　ngo　　zungji　heoi　　ge.
　　　No-where　　is　　I　　　like　　go　　SP
　　　'It is nowhere that I like to go.'

According to Chomsky (1977) and Cheng (1991), Left Dislocation involves movement of an NP to a higher position followed by the subsequent deletion of the overt resumptive pronoun in PF. In Cantonese, moving a Neg-whQ_obj out of a complex NP with both subordinate and matrix verbs marked as finite leads to Subjacency violation as in (20).

(20) *Ngo *mou-bingo*ᵢ　　teng-guo[_NP *t*ᵢ　nei *t*ᵢ　zungji-guo *t*ᵢ　　ge gongfat].
　　　I　　no-who　　　　hear-ASP　　you　　like-ASP　　　GE saying

The presence of a resumptive pronoun in the base-generated object position in (21), rescues the ungrammaticality. The ungrammaticality of in (22), where the resumptive pronoun *keoi* occurs in a preverbal position within the complex NP, suggests that Neg-whQ_obj is not base-generated in a preverbal position. Therefore, the Neg-whQ_obj undergoing overt and obligatory raising is a preferable account.

(21) Ngo *mou-bingo*ᵢ teng-guo[_NP *t*ᵢ nei *t*ᵢ zungji-guo keoiᵢ ge　gongfat].
　　　I　　no-who　　hear-ASP　　you like-ASP　　him GE saying
　　　'Nobodyᵢ, I heard the saying that you likes himᵢ.'

(22) *Ngo *mou-bingo*ᵢ teng-guo[_NP *t*ᵢ nei　keoiᵢ zungji-guo ge　gongfat].
　　　I　　no-who　　　hear-ASP　　you him like-ASP　　GE saying
　　　'Nobodyᵢ, I heard the saying that you likes himᵢ.'

The movement account is also supported by the fact that Neg-whQs are syntactically different from the negator *m*. Neg-whQs are not base-generated in NegP like the negator *m*:

(23) Ngo　*mou-matje*　　m　　　sik (gaa3).
　　　I　　no-what　　　not　　eat (SP)
　　　a. 'There is nothing that I don't eat.'
　　　b. 'There are only a few things that I don't eat.'
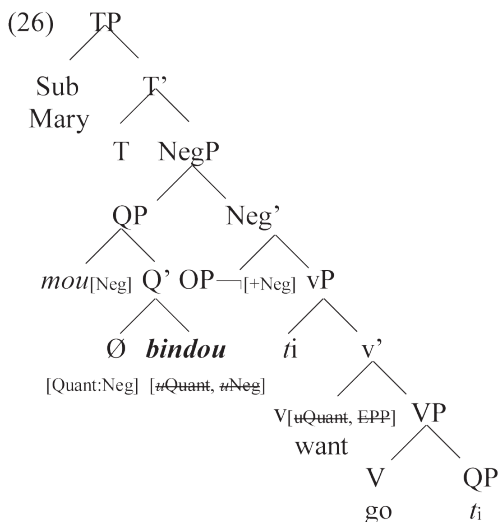
(24) Ngo *mou-matje*   zyundan   *m*   sik.
    I no-what   intentionally   not   eat
    a. 'There is nothing that I do not eat.'
    b. 'There are only a few things that I do not eat.'

(25) *Ngo m   *mou-matje*   sik.
    I   not   no-what   eat
    a. *'There is nothing I do not eat.'
    b. *'There are only a few things that I do not eat.'

The dual interpretation remains when *m* and *mou-matje* co-occur in (23), where *mou-matje* precedes *m*. While the negator *m* is the head of NegP, Neg-whQs appear to be less attached to the verb comparing to *m*, where an adverb can be inserted between the two in (24), the negator *m* preceding *mou-matje* leads to ungrammaticality in (25).

5. Accounting for the dual interpretation

The proposed Neg-whQ-phrase structure in section 3 not only accounts for the SOV word order, but also the full interpretation of a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction. Based on the above assumption of the two pre-Spell-Out mechanisms, the decomposition takes place following overt movements.

Given that the negative proposition of *wh*-words are triggered in a pre-modal/negation position as discussed in section 2, the ambiguity of a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ could possibly be made available under the double negated context after decomposition. The following tree illustrates this idea:

(26)

```
              TP
           /      \
         Sub       T'
        Mary      /   \
                 T    NegP
                    /      \
                  QP       Neg'
                 /  \      /    \
        mou[Neg]  Q'  OP—[+Neg]  vP
                 /          \    /  \
                Ø  bindou   ti    v'
         [Quant:Neg] [uQuant, uNeg]  /  \
                           V[uQuant, EPP]  VP
                               want      /  \
                                        V    QP
                                       go    ti
```

(27) Semantic representation of the existential reading:

$\neg \ldots \neg \exists(x)$ [place (x) I want to go to x]

'It is not the case, such that there is not a place x that I want to go.'

(Lit. 'There is at least somewhere I want to go.')

The choice of interpretation is context-dependent. A [p][5] feature related to sentence-final particles (SP) at the CP is also proposed, which indicates the presupposition of information shared between the speaker and the addressee. The lowering tone or an additional SP with [-p] feature (e.g. *laa3*), granting Neg-whQ a valued [Quant:-p], tends to push the negative reading as in (28), whereas a rising tone or an additional SP with [+p] (e.g. *zaa3*[6]), granting Neg-whQ a valued [Quant:+p], tends to push the existential reading as in (29).

(28) Ngo　*mou-matje*　　　soeng　maai　*laa3* ('inchoative').

　　 I　　no-what　　　　want　　buy　　SP$_{[-p]}$

　　 a. 'I want to buy nothing.'

　　 b. *'I want to buy only a few things.'

(29) Ngo　*mou-matje*　　　soeng　maai　*zaa3* ('only').

　　 I　　no-what　　　　want　　buy　　SP$_{[+p]}$

　　 a. *'I want to buy nothing.'

　　 b. 'I want to buy only a few things.'

According to Cheng, Huang and Tang, *mou* as a negator is used with various aspects and accomplished verbs only, it cannot be used with the perfective aspectual marker *-zo* and can be interpreted as perfective on its own (1996: 68). The grammaticality of (30) in the following suggests that the existential 'only a few' reading is pushed with the presence of a SP with [+p] feature.

(30) Keoi　*mou-matje*　　　maai-zo　　　*zaa3*$_{[+p]}$.

　　 He　　no-what　　　　buy-ASP　　　SP$_{[+p]}$

　　 a. *'He bought nothing.'

　　 b. 'He bought only a few things!'

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[5]　Cantonese sentence particles are categorised by the co-occurrence of SPs with negative quantifiers and 'only a few' existential quantifiers based on Law (2002) and a [p] feature is assumed in association of the presuppose knowledge of something discussed or something taken place in the background shared between the speaker and addressee (Lee 2014).

[6]　The SP *zaa3* ('only') indicates a restrictive focus 'only' (Tang 1998, Law 2002). The existential interpretation of the Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ is pushed in the presence of an SP like *zaa3*.

In addition, example (30) clearly shows that Neg-whQ is not associating with a negative reading in this context whenever an aspectual marker is present.

(31) Keoi   tung   *mou-bingo*   king-guo-gai   *(zaa3$_{[+p]}$.).
He   and   no-who   talk to-ASP   SP$_{[+p]}$
a. *'He talked to nobody.'
b. 'He only talked to a few people!'

The SP *zaa3*$_{[+p]}$ licensing the existential reading in (31b) is therefore obligatory in a context which presupposes the existence of someone as a target of the verb "talked".

6. Conclusion

This study looks at the uniqueness of Cantonese Neg-whQs, in particular those in the object position, in comparison to their close counterparts in MC (e.g. *meiyou-shei*) and English (e.g. *nowhere*). The SOV word order and dual interpretation of a Neg-whQ$_{obj}$ construction are accounted for by the proposed Neg-whQ-phrase, which explains the complex morphological structure of a Neg-whQ as a result of merge {mou {Ø, bingo}}. In contrast, Neg-whQs in the other two languages, where they are only limited to the subject position in MC, have a simpler morphological structure as a result of merge {'no', *wh*-phrase}. The proposed structure grants Neg-whQs in Cantonese both [Neg] and [Quant:_] features, which trigger movement to [Spec, vP] to satisfy the [uQuant] and EPP feature, giving rise to the negative reading; then to [Spec, NegP] where decomposition takes place and *wh*-phrase is triggered as negative proposition, and the existential 'only a few' reading is made available under double negations.

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中國語文通訊
CURRENT RESEARCH IN CHINESE LINGUISTICS

粵語的否定 - 疑問 - 量詞：
比較語法的句法分析

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提要

本文檢視粵語口語，提出在句法跟語義的扣接上，有一種否定 - 疑問 - 量詞（Negative *wh-quantifier*）。否定 - 疑問 - 量詞在粵語口語，一般都是由一個否定詞"無"與一個疑問詞"乜嘢"、"邊個"、"邊度"組成。有別於"主動賓"此一定律，此結構作為賓語之時可獨有地出現"主賓動"的造句組合，並同時可解作"無"或"只有少數"。即使在漢語和英語有以否定 - 疑問 - 量詞為主語，但均無"主賓動"此例。就否定 - 疑問 - 量詞進行特徵分析，本文析述此一賓語非隱性移位現象，並說明其組構如何可供雙重詮釋。

關鍵詞

Neg-whQs，否定疑問量詞結構，非隱蔽移位，雙重詮釋