

# From “Ding<sup>1</sup>Dong<sup>1</sup>” to “Ding<sup>4</sup>Ling<sup>1</sup>Dong<sup>4</sup>Long<sup>4</sup>”: Reflections on Yue – Cantonese Quadra-syllabic Expressions

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## Abstract

Quadrasyllabic Expressions (QIE's) are emblematic of the Chinese language. They showcase the succinct nature of the language and the rich depth of Chinese culture. Members from all walks of life are fond of using them. This paper explores some special features of derived metaphorical meaning and semantic expansion through: (1) the transposition of linguistic elements and (2) concomitant onomatopoeic and semantic expansion through L Alteration and Rhyming. It is hoped that the exploration of such unique features of Cantonese QIEs and their comparison with languages in South China as well as mostly phonotactically conditioned tone sandhi in Mandarin could shed light on questions of longitudinal transmission and latitudinal innovation in these linguistic areas.

## Keywords

idioms, Quadrasyllabic Expressions, rhetorical language, Cantonese

## 1. Introduction

Disyllabic onomatopoeic expressions such as “*Ding Dang*” or “*Ding Dong*” or their derivative quadrasyllabic expression such as “*DingDing DongDong*” or “*DingDong DingDong*” may be commonly found among many languages in the world. Some examples in Mandarin and their Cantonese counterparts are given in Table 1:

Table 1 Quadra-syllabic expressions in Mandarin and Cantonese

			Mandarin	Cantonese
A	1	叮叮咚咚	dingding dongdong	dingding dongdong
	2	乒乒乒乓	pingping pangpang	pingping bangbang
	3	嘖嘖喳喳	jiji zhazha	zizi zaza



B	4	叮噹叮噹	dingdong dingdong	dingdong dingdong
	5	當郎當郎	danglang danglang	donglong donglong
	6	撲隆撲隆	pulong pulong	(poklung poklung) pulung pulung
	7	啪拉啪拉	pala pala	paalaa paalaa
	8	卡拉卡拉	kala kala	kaalaa kaalaa
	9	嘟嚕嘟嚕	dulu dulu	dulu dulu
C	10	叮零咚隆	dingling donglong	dingling dunglung
	11	辟里啪拉	pili pala	pili paalaa
	12	乒鈴乒啷	pingling panglang	pingling banglang
	13	噤里咕嚕	jili gulu	gili gulu
	14	叮鈴當啷	dingling danglang	dingling donglong
	15	嗚里哇啦	wuli wala	wili waalaa

They are derived from the reduplication of a base form “ $C_1VC_2$ ” to become:

$$(a) \text{“}C_1V_1C_2\text{”} + (b) \text{“}C_1V_2C_2\text{”}$$

where  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  are usually cardinal vowels with optimal differentiation between them in terms of vowel height and points of articulation. The further expansion from 2-syllable to 4-syllable expressions (e.g., “*Ding Dang Ding Dang*” or “*Ding Ding Dang Dang*”) are represented as either “**abab**” or “**aabb**” form. It may be possible to put forth a putative claim that a language which has either “**abab**” or “**aabb**” forms of expressions would also have “**ab**” expressions, though the reverse may not be true.

## 2. Quadra-syllabic expressions as semi-closed constructions

The expressions of interest in this paper constitute a special subset of commonly found onomatopoeic expressions. They show varying degrees of structure such as choice of cardinal vowels and “**abab**” or “**aabb**” forms in semi-closed constructions, which are similar to some idioms, and still other structural properties.

For example, in contrast to the alternation of cardinal vowels, another means could be to have “**I**” as the replacement of the initial consonant of the replicated syllable so as to obtain “*Dingling*” or “*Donglong*”, and the full expansion could be as follows:

$$\text{“}C_1VC_2+C_1VC_2\text{”} \rightarrow \text{“}C_1VC_2+HVC_2\text{”}$$

Other relevant expressions for open syllables could be “*Dili Dala*” and “*Pili Pala*”. It should be noted there are clear restrictions on this type of constructions. The initial vowel in the base

form in most cases would be only the high front vowel [i] and the initial consonant in the replicated syllable would be replaced by [I]. This is true of Chinese dialects such as Mandarin and Cantonese. Thus \*[lingding], \*[dinglong], \*[longding], for example, would not belong to this type of construction but would be just examples of common onomatopoeia.

It is further noteworthy that the tone patterns of this type of quadra-syllabic expressions in both Mandarin and Cantonese could have uniformly high tones “HHHH” or uniformly low tones “LLLL”.<sup>1</sup> However, Cantonese also has developed an additional variant form with “LHLL” tone pattern e.g. “Ding<sup>4</sup>ling<sup>1</sup>Dong<sup>4</sup>long<sup>4</sup>” with the second syllable having the high tone, in stark contrast to the three other uniformly low tones. This tone pattern is quite unique, so that patterns such as the following are usually unacceptable as belonging to this type of construction but may be examples of open onomatopoeic expressions:

\*L L H L (\*Ding2 ling2 Dang1 lang2)

\*L L L H (\*Ding2 ling2 Dang2 lang1)

\*H L L L (\*Ding1 ling2 Dang2 lang1)

This third series of quadra-syllabic expressions can show meaningful contrast with the others as will be discussed below. Furthermore, the Cantonese expressions may have distinct grammatical functions:

- (1) 一日到晚 **Fi<sup>4</sup>Li<sup>4</sup>Fe<sup>4</sup>Le<sup>4</sup>** 唔停噉打乞嚏 (Adverb) ;  
“He **Fi<sup>4</sup>Li<sup>4</sup>Fe<sup>4</sup>Le<sup>4</sup>** like sneezes without stopping day and night.”
- (2) 佢 **Fi<sup>4</sup>Li<sup>4</sup>Fe<sup>4</sup>Le<sup>4</sup>** 咗三日 (Verb) ;  
“He ‘**Fi<sup>4</sup>Li<sup>4</sup>Fe<sup>4</sup>Le<sup>4</sup>**’-ed (sneezed) for 3 days.”
- (3) 啲嘢真多, **kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>/kwi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>** (乜) 都有 (Noun) .  
“There are plenty of things, all kinds of stuff are there.”

The three fixed tone patterns and the associated part-of-speech distinctions of the Cantonese expressions allow us to distinguish them from the Mandarin expressions whose grammatical status is not as obvious, and may be classified as a distinct type of Quadra-syllabic Idiomatic Expressions (QIEs).

This unusual feature in Cantonese deserves closer attention in relationship to other semi-closed 4-syllabic expressions in general. As has been suggested among the Chinese dialect

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<sup>1</sup> For Mandarin, the high tone maybe recognized as Tone1 or Tone2 (Upper Even Tone or Lower Even Tone with high level or high rising contour). For Cantonese, the high tones are Tone1 and Tone7 (Upper Even Tone and Entering Tone) and the Low tone is typically the Low Even Tone with low falling pitch.

groups, the Yue dialects are often seen to have closer links with the non-Sinitic languages in Southwestern China and neighboring countries (Li 1994, Mai 1993, Tsou 1979). Various attempts in linguistic reconstruction have been made to explore some possibly non-casual links such as morphological derivations and sounded symbolism (Tsou 1978, Kam 1977), and it would be useful to explore similar questions in terms of this kind of quadra-syllabic expressions, which deserve comparison in the context of the other types of semantically based quadra-syllabic expressions in Chinese and in neighboring languages.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The meaning of phonologically based QIE's

Let us consider the following examples:

- (4) **fit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>/fi<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>**  
 a. 佢 **fit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>/fi<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>** 傷風感冒索鼻水。<sup>3</sup>  
 “He (is) **fit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>/fi<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>** having a cold and sniffing.”  
 b. 叫親佢做嘢，佢就 **fit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>/fi<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>**。唔到一陣間就做囉，好差。[from film dialogue by 李香琴]  
 “Whenever he is asked to do something, he would **fit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>/fi<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>fet<sup>4</sup>let<sup>4</sup>**, finishing it in a jiffy, quite bad.”
- (5) **si<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>saa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>**  
 a. 雨點睇打在玻璃窗上面到，好大聲。  
 “The sound of raindrops **si<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>saa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** hitting the glass windows.”  
 b. 無幾分鐘就 **si<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>saa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** 洗完啦。做得好差。  
 “In a few minutes, he **si<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>saa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** finished washing, very badly done.”
- (6) **zi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>zoe<sup>1</sup>loe<sup>1</sup>**  
 a. **zi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>zoe<sup>1</sup>loe<sup>1</sup>** 不停的大聲說話。  
 “**zi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>zoe<sup>1</sup>loe<sup>1</sup>** keeps on talking loudly.”  
 b. 細蚊仔，唔可以成日 **zi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>zoe<sup>1</sup>loe<sup>1</sup>** 多嘴。  
 “kids, you cannot **zi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>zoe<sup>1</sup>loe<sup>1</sup>** talk too much all day.”
- (7) **kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>/kwi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>**  
 a. 行路時木屐 **kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>/kwi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>** 敲打木板哋聲音好響。  
 “While walking on the wooden floor, the sound of wooden clogs, **kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>/kwi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>**, hitting the wooden floor is very loud.”

<sup>2</sup> Such as 張三李四，親朋戚友，張冠李戴 (see also Tsou 2013a, 2013b; Zou 2015, 2017a, 2017b).

<sup>3</sup> We are grateful to a reviewer for suggesting that the all the low tones could be 6 instead of 4, i.e. fit<sup>6</sup>lit<sup>6</sup>fet<sup>6</sup>let<sup>6</sup>.

b. 啲嘢真多，**kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>/kwi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>**（乜）都有。  
“There are plenty of things, all kinds of **kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>/kwi<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kwaak<sup>1</sup>laak<sup>1</sup>**,  
(stuff) are there.”

(8) a. **di<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>daa<sup>1</sup>laa<sup>1</sup>**

而家學講嘢 **aa<sup>3</sup>**，成日 **di<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>daa<sup>1</sup>laa<sup>1</sup>**，鬼嚟開心，但係唔知佢講乜。

“Now learning to speak, all day **di<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>daa<sup>1</sup>laa<sup>1</sup>** having fun like hell, but no one knows what he is saying.”

b. **di<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>daa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>**

琴晚半夜落大雨，**di<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>daa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** 鬼咁大聲，畀佢嘈醒。

“There was pouring rain in the middle of the night, **di<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>daa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** loud like hell, woke me up yesterday.”

c. **di<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>daa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>**

加拿大呢道落雪 **tim<sup>1</sup>aa<sup>3</sup>**，**di<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>daa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** 噉落到成條街白 **saai<sup>3</sup>**。

“We have also sleet here in Canada, falling **di<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>daa<sup>4</sup>laa<sup>4</sup>** to make the whole street white.”

(9) a. **ki<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>1</sup>lung<sup>1</sup>/king<sup>1</sup>king<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>1</sup>lung<sup>1</sup>**

我哋細紋仔個陣，最鍾意 **gyun<sup>1</sup>** 入啲大水渠裏便玩，講嘢有回聲 **gaa<sup>3</sup>**，啲流水 **ki<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>1</sup>lung<sup>1</sup>** 噉聲，好得意 **gaa<sup>3</sup>**。

“When we were kids, we liked to crawl into the big drain pipes to play; there were echoes when we talked, the flowing water sounded **ki<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>1</sup>lung<sup>1</sup>/king<sup>1</sup>king<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>1</sup>lung<sup>1</sup>**, really fun.”

b. **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>/king<sup>4</sup>king<sup>4</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>**

個道咁近火車軌，成日 **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>/king<sup>4</sup>king<sup>4</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>**，好嘈 **ge<sup>1</sup>bo<sup>1</sup>**。

“It is so near the train tracks, whole day **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>/king<sup>4</sup>king<sup>4</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>**, very noisy.”

c. **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>/king<sup>4</sup>king<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>**

以前近機場就 **wing<sup>4</sup>ling<sup>1</sup>wang<sup>4</sup>lang<sup>4</sup>**，而家近火車軌就成日到黑 **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>**，貪平租，冇計 **laa<sup>1</sup>**。

“It was near the airport so **wing<sup>4</sup>ling<sup>1</sup>wang<sup>4</sup>lang<sup>4</sup>**, now it is near the train tracks, so it is **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kung<sup>4</sup>lung<sup>4</sup>** from day to night. The rent is cheap! What to do?”

(10) a. **ki<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kok<sup>1</sup>lok<sup>1</sup>/kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kok<sup>1</sup>lok<sup>1</sup>**

個木槌槌 **ki<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kok<sup>1</sup>lok<sup>1</sup>/kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kok<sup>1</sup>lok<sup>1</sup>**，佢都唔知幾鍾意，一日搖到黑，你唔理佢，佢可以玩成日 **ge<sup>3</sup>laa<sup>3</sup>**。

“The little wooden hammer **ki<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>kok<sup>1</sup>lok<sup>1</sup>/kik<sup>1</sup>lik<sup>1</sup>kok<sup>1</sup>lok<sup>1</sup>**, he is really having fun, shaking it from day to night, no need to pay attention to him, he could be at it all day.”

b. **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>/kik<sup>4</sup>lik<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>**

條走廊又長又靜，啲女人著高蹻鞋行過，**ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>/kik<sup>4</sup>lik<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>** 都唔知幾應聲！

“The corridor is long and quiet, the ladies come through with their high heels **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>/kik<sup>4</sup>lik<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>**, really echoing around.

c. **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>/kik<sup>4</sup>lik<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>**

叫佢哋著平底鞋或者運動鞋，咪唔會成日 **kik<sup>4</sup>lik<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup> lo<sup>1</sup>**。

“Tell them to wear flat heel shoes or sneakers, then the whole day would not **ki<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>/kik<sup>4</sup>lik<sup>4</sup>kok<sup>4</sup>lok<sup>4</sup>**.”

(11) a. **ti<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>1</sup>laat<sup>1</sup>/tit<sup>1</sup>lit<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>1</sup>laat<sup>1</sup>**

最鍾意著爹哋嘅皮拖鞋，**ti<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>1</sup>laat<sup>1</sup>**，懶得意。

“He likes wearing daddy’s leather slippers, **ti<sup>1</sup>li<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>1</sup>laat<sup>1</sup>/tit<sup>1</sup>lit<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>1</sup>laat<sup>1</sup>** having fun.”

b. **ti<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>/tit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>**

去到邊都係著住對蹻蹻鞋，**ti<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>/tit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>** 成個癲咗嘍。

“Wearing a pair of worn shoes wherever he wants, **ti<sup>4</sup>li<sup>4</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>/tit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>4</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>** like he is nuts.”

c. **ti<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>/tit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>**

嗰道好得意 **gaa<sup>3</sup>**，有人著鞋 **gaa<sup>3</sup>**，唔係著拖鞋就係著履，四圍都 **tit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>**。

“Very interesting there! People wear shoes, if it is not slippers then it’d be wooden clogs, it is **ti<sup>4</sup>li<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>/tit<sup>4</sup>lit<sup>1</sup>taat<sup>4</sup>laat<sup>4</sup>** everywhere.”

The above examples of quadra-syllabic expressions with uniformly high or low tones provide onomatopoeic echoes of actual situations in which there is the iconic projection of mapping between the tonal phenomena and the natural events. The illustrative examples could relate to the gurgling sounds of baby’s first attempts to speak (6a), to a talkative child (6b), and to clicking high heels (10b). On the other hand, in contrast to these cases, the low tone pattern relates to rumbling trains (9b), heavy pouring rain (8b), and (nasal problems associated with severe cold) sniffing (4a). However, when the tone patterns become [LHLL], there is the introduction of a contrastive projection of a sustained state of affairs, with implied regularity of droning airplanes at the airport and, of trains by the side of active train tracks (9c), of high heels in sustained action (10c), and regular dreary climatic condition (8c). The contrastive sustained effect may be attributed to the impressions evoked by the unexpected and uneven tonal differentiation and may be associated with a greater load in the cognitive processing of expressions with non-uniform pitch than uniform pitch. This claim invites verification from empirical sources.

#### 4. Comparison between Cantonese QIE and Mandarin tone sandhi

The relatively unique Cantonese tone variation pattern may be compared with the tone sandhi phenomenon of a sequence of T3 low tones in Mandarin.

For example:

想買老酒 (T3 T3 T3 T3)

Following the most common tone sandhi rule (Chao 1948, Cheng 1973), T3T3 → T2T3, and its cyclical applications, the following derivations may be obtained:

想買老酒 : T3 T3 T3 T3 → T2 T3 T3 T3  
 → T2 T2 T3 T3  
 → T2 T2 T2 T3

It may be noted that Y. R. Chao also drew attention to the non-initial T2 becoming T1 in rapid speech (Chao 1948): “If in a three-syllable word or phrase the first syllable is a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Tone, the second is a 2<sup>nd</sup> Tone, and the third syllable is any except neutral tone (to be described below), then the second syllable (which is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tone) is pronounced in the 1<sup>st</sup> Tone.” It can be seen that these two tone sandhi rules serve to functionally differentiate monotonic sequences. His examples are given below:

Table 2

Tone		Mandarin
T2 T2 T1 → T2 T1 T1	梅蘭芳	Mei lan fang
T2 T2 T2 → T2 T1 T2	還沒來	Hai mei lai
T2 T2 T3 → T2 T1 T3	完全懂	Wan quan dong
T2 T2 T4 → T2 T1 T4	巡洋艦	Xun yang jian
T2 T2 T3 → T2 T1 T3	寒暑表	Hanshu biao

On this basis, 想買老酒 could have a further form: T2 T1 T1 T3

However, this further tone sandhi variation appears to be associated with the Beijing dialect in the early 20th Century. It is less readily found in the speech of the Putonghua speakers in general, as is the case with younger speakers who are descendants of immigrants in Beijing.

While there is no obvious semantic difference between the inclusion or non-inclusion of tone sandhi in Mandarin, it is clear that there is significant pragmatic difference if one simply compares the two situations in which the sandhi rules do or do not apply. This would be another instance of economical differentiation of phonological space to optimize the efficacy of communication (Martinet 1955).

## 5. Concluding remarks

We have attempted to show that the replication of phonological elements with or without modification can be usefully deployed to enhance verbal communication. The case of QIE's reported here is quite unique. The Chinese dialects such as Mandarin and Cantonese provide a good case in point.<sup>4</sup> The additional Cantonese development of [LHLL] tone pattern to iconically convey significant sustained effect has a simpler parallel in the use of tone sandhi in Mandarin to optimize communication and invites broader investigation. It also contributes to enriching the linguistic parallelism favoured in the Chinese discursal and poetic traditions (Tsou 1968).

It should be noted that there is an age gradient in the use of [LHLL] tone pattern in Cantonese. While the structural constraints on vowel sequence and tone distribution of QIE's with [LHLL] tone pattern are fully within the linguistic competence of the Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong. Very often, only speakers over the age of 50 may be familiar with the semantic differences when the expression is compared with those having the uniform level tones. It remains to be investigated what may be the extent of this pattern found among the younger generations, including when children may acquire such linguistic competence, and the extent they may be found among the Cantonese speakers within the Pearl River Delta.

Furthermore, the introduction of the [LHLL] tone pattern in Cantonese presents a case of the optimization of phonological space ala Martinet (1955) which is also echoed in Mandarin Tone Sandhi, resulting in the introduction of one or more high tones in low tone sequences. That there is an apparent age gradient in the variations found in both Hong Kong and Beijing raises the question on whether they represent receding phenomena, and, if so, whether recent demographic changes in Hong Kong (Zou & You 2003) and in Beijing (Lin 2000) in the last half century may be a contributing factor.

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<sup>4</sup> More examples of Cantonese QIE may be found in <http://www.livac.org/yueqie/>.



of Chinese Linguistics (IACL-21), Tapei, The 22<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Yue Dialects, The Conference on Quadra-syllabic Expression in Southwestern China, Chinese University of Hong Kong 2015, and a public lecture at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, January 2019. I have benefited from the support provided by a GRF grant from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (Project No.: 844012) and from The Lord Wilson Heritage Trust in 2016. I am also no less indebted to a number of colleagues with whom I have had stimulating discussions on the subject matter of this paper. They include Andy Chin, Hintat Cheung, Samuel Cheung, Thomas Lee, C.S. Leung, Shin Kataoka and Kenny Mok. However, I alone should be responsible for any errors in the content of this paper.

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## 從“ㄨ 叮 ㄨ 嘴”到“ㄨ 叮 ㄨ 鈴 ㄨ 嘴 ㄨ 啣”探討粵語四字格慣用語

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### 提要

四字詞語，尤其是四字慣用語、熟語、成語是漢語突出的標誌，它們彰顯漢語的精簡結構和中國文化的深厚內涵，如：“井底之蛙”、“三過其門”；粵語裡的“雞手鴨腳”和“詐傻扮懵”等。無論社會賢達或販夫走卒無不採用，如：“遇水搭橋”、“朝行晚拆”。

本文將分析從字面意義引申到深層隱喻的一種方法：擬聲詞來母雙聲疊韻的擴展，如漢語的“噤里咕嚕”、“叮零咚隆”；又如鮮為人知的粵語普遍使用的四音節擬聲詞：

“bing<sup>4</sup>ling<sup>1</sup>bang<sup>4</sup>lang<sup>4</sup>”、“bing<sup>1</sup>ling<sup>1</sup>bang<sup>1</sup>lang<sup>1</sup>”、“bing<sup>4</sup>ling<sup>4</sup>bang<sup>4</sup>lang<sup>4</sup>”等，盼能藉著粵語四字詞語的一些獨特結構面貌和豐富背景，引起和其他中國南方語言與官話比較以探討語言傳承與創新的問題。

### 關鍵詞

成語熟語，四字詞語，修辭語言，粵語

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