

On the absence of pseudo-gapping in Cantonese

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The 29th Conference on Yue Dialects (Yue 29)

October 27–28, 2025

Macao Polytechnic University

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Introduction

- A verb or a verb phrase can be deleted in both English and Cantonese.

(1) VPE - a verb phrase is missing

- John should eat potatoes, and Mary should Δ_{VP} , too.
- 阿明應該食兩碗飯，佢個仔都應該 Δ_{VP} 。

(2) Gapping - a main verb is missing

- John ate potatoes, and Mary Δ_V tomatoes.
- 阿明 食咗 兩碗飯，佢個仔 Δ_V 三碗。

(3) Pseudogapping - a main verb below an auxiliary is missing

- John should eat potatoes, and Mary should Δ_V tomatoes.
- 阿明應該 食 兩碗飯，佢個仔應該 Δ_V 三碗。

Introduction

- While VPE exhibits many similarities in the two languages, **Gapping** is argued to be substantially different (Tang 2001).
 - English - two mainstream analyses
- (4) a. Move+Delete (Coppock 2001; Lin 2001; Depiante 2000)
- John ate potatoes, and Mary₁ tomatoes₂ [t₁ eat t₂].
-
- b. The Across-the-Board (ATB) movement (Johnson 2009)
- John₁ ate₂ [t₁ t₂ potatoes], and [Mary t₂ tomatoes].
-

Introduction

- Tang (2001) argues that Mandarin **Gapping** involve empty verbs, no movement at all (applicable to Cantonese).

(5) Empty verbs

- 小明 吃了 兩碗飯，他兒子 \emptyset_V 三碗。
- 阿明 食咗 兩碗飯，佢個仔 \emptyset_V 三碗。

→ What appears to be Gapping in Chinese involves no ellipsis at all.

Introduction

- The goal of this talk is to extend this line of research to **Pseudogapping**.
- Some examples in Cantonese:

- (6) a. 大人要 訓 八個鐘，而小朋友要 Δ_V 十四個鐘。
- b. VIP可以 抽 三次，但普通會員淨係可以 Δ_V 一次咋。
- c. 暑假阿明會 睇 兩本中文書，阿芬會 Δ_V 兩本英文書。
- d. 聽講阿明可能 揀 中文系，而阿芬可能 Δ_V 英文系。

Introduction

- We argue that **Pseudogapping** in Cantonese is substantially different from those in English.
 - English: Move+Delete (Jayaseelan 1990; Lasnik 1995, 1999)
 - Cantonese: empty verbs
- We suggest that what appears to be **Pseudogapping** in Cantonese involve empty verbs, rather than ellipsis.

	English	Cantonese
Gapping	Move+Delete/ATB	empty verbs
Pseudogapping	Move+Delete	empty verbs

Introduction

- Empirical implications
 - This work supplements the very rare discussions on missing verbal elements, in addition to the more studied VPE, and Gapping.
 - It reveals important differences between Chinese languages and English.
- Theoretical implications
 - The absence of pseudogapping and gapping underlies a general ban on Move+Delete in Chinese languages.
 - Given that object movement and clausal/VP ellipsis are well attested in Chinese, it calls for an analysis as to why a combination of these operations is consistently ruled out.

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Deriving Pseudogapping

- Derivation: a combination of movement and deletion, e.g., Jayaseelan (1990) and Lasnik (1995, 1999).

(7) Pseudogapping in English

- a. Mary hasn't dated Bill, but she has Δ Harry.

(Jayaseelan 1990, p.12)

- b. Derivation

Mary hasn't dated Bill, but she has Harry₁ [~~dated t₁~~].



Deriving Pseudogapping

- Evidence: obligatory adjunct-included reading in the second clause

- (8) a. Mary hasn't [**secretly** dated Bill], but she has Δ Harry,
 #though not secretly . (p.c. with Daniel Plesniak)
- b. Renn [looks as handsome **to her** at fifty-two]
 as he did Δ at twenty-six. (Nykiel 2025, p.17)

(9) Derivation of (8a)

Mary hasn't **secretly** dated Bill,
 but she has Harry₁ [~~**secretly** dated t₁~~].



Deriving Pseudogapping

- It is tempting to apply Move+Delete to Cantonese as well.
- Both operations are legitimate in Cantonese.
 - The movement can target a low focus projection.
 - VPE is common in the language.

Deriving Pseudogapping

- Despite the plausibility of this approach, we however argue that Cantonese Pseudogapping does not involve Move+Delete.
- We present three challenges to such an approach (next section)
- We propose that an empty verb is involved in these cases. (next next section)

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#1: Challenges to Move+Delete

Non-obligatory adjunct reading

- Unlike English Pseudogapping, the adjunct reading in the first clause is not obligatory in the second clause.

- (10) a. 阿明可以 [一口氣 做 50 下掌上壓] ,
佢個仔可以 Δ 30 下。
- b. 不過中間要休息吓。

#1: Challenges to Move+Delete

- More examples:

(11) a. 聽講阿明可能 [好唔情願嘅 揀 中文系] ,
而阿芬可能 Δ_V 英文系。

b. 不過阿芬一開始就係想讀英文嘅。

(12) a. 大人要 [連續 訓 八個鐘] , 而小朋友要 Δ_V
十四個鐘。

b. 不過小朋友可以訓晏覺補數。

#2: Challenges to Move+Delete

Move+Delete overgenerates

- It wrongly predicts cases involving control predicates to be possible.

- (13) a. *阿明 想 買 三本書，阿芬淨係想 Δ 兩本書。
 b. *阿明 決定 學 兩種語言，阿芬決定 Δ 三種語言。
 c. *阿明 識 去 圖書館，阿芬識 Δ 體育館。

- It is unclear why they contrast sharply with modals.

- (14) a. 阿明 會 買 三本書，阿芬淨係會 Δ 兩本書。
 b. 阿明 可以 學 兩種語言，阿芬可以 Δ 三種語言。
 c. 阿明 應該 去 圖書館，阿芬應該 Δ 體育館。

#3: Challenges to Move+Delete

Move+Delete undergenerates

- Movements of *dak*-clause and *dou*-clause are illicit, but they can appear in the apparent Pseudogapping constructions.

(15) a. Manner *dak*-clause

*阿明 [好快] 睇得 ~~好快~~。

b. Resultative *dou*-clause

*阿明 [流晒鼻水] 食到 ~~流晒鼻水~~。

(16) Possible remnants in Pseudogapping

a. 呢本書，阿明 睇得 好慢，佢個仔 △ [好快]

b. 呢碗酸辣湯，阿明 食到 狂咳，佢個仔 △ [流晒鼻水]

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Empty verbs

- We propose that **Pseudogapping** in Cantonese involves an empty verb \emptyset_V .
 - It is “a verbal category that lacks phonetic features” (Tang 2001, p.205).
 - More specifically, we propose that it is a **covert copula verb**.
 - It establishes a **topic-comment relation** between the preceding and following strings.

(17) Derivation

阿明應該 食 兩碗飯，佢個仔應該 $\emptyset_{係}$ 三碗。

Empty verbs

- The empty copula verb can be overt in most cases.

- (18) a. 大人要訓八個鐘，而小朋友要係十四個鐘。
 b. ?VIP可以抽三次，但普通會員淨係可以係一次咋。
 c. 暑假阿明會睇兩本中文書，阿芬會係兩本英文書。
 d. 聽講阿明可能揀中文系，而阿芬可能係英文系。

#1 Evidence for empty verbs

- **The empty verb proposed here obeys the same semantic restriction as discussed in Tang (2001).**

- (19) Some characteristics of the empty verb sentences in Chinese
- The empty verb sentences should not be non-episodic.
 - The second nominal should not be existential/indefinite.
- (20) a. Non-episodic: *張三喜歡蘋果，李四 Δ 橘子。
- b. Episodic: 我喝湯，你 Δ 汽水。
- (21) a. Indefinite: *我喝完了湯，你 Δ 汽水。
- b. Quantity: 張三吃了三個蘋果，李四 Δ 四個橘子。

#1 Evidence for empty verbs

- The restriction is also observed in Pseudogapping in Cantonese.

- (22) a. Non-episodic: *阿明可能中意蘋果，阿芬可能 Δ 橙。
- b. Episodic: 我可以飲湯，你只可以 Δ 汽水。
- (23) a. Indefinite: *我可能飲完咗湯，你可能 Δ 汽水。
- b. Quantity:
阿明應該食咗三個蘋果，阿芬應該 Δ 四個橙。

#2 Evidence for empty verbs

- **Modals in Chinese retain their verbal status (Lin and Tang 1995), and thus can be replaced by an empty verb.**

- (24)
- 阿明 應該 食兩碗飯，佢個仔 Δ 食三碗。
 - 大人 要 訓七個鐘，小朋友 Δ 訓十四個鐘。
 - VIP 可以 抽三次，但普通會員淨係 Δ 抽一次咋。
 - 暑假阿明 會 睇兩本中文書，阿芬 Δ 睇兩本英文書。
 - 聽講阿明 可能 揀中文系，阿芬 Δ 揀英文系。

- This indeed suggests Gapping and Pseudogapping may indeed be the same phenomenon in Chinese.

#2 Evidence for empty verbs

- It also predicts that more than one verb can be missing.

- (25) a. 阿明 應該 食 兩碗飯，佢個仔 Δ Δ 三碗。
- b. 大人 要 訓 七個鐘，小朋友 Δ Δ 十四個鐘。
- c. VIP 可以 抽 三次，但普通會員淨係 Δ Δ 一次咋。
- d. 暑假阿明 會 睇 兩本中文書，阿芬 Δ Δ 兩本英文書。
- e. 聽講阿明 可能 揀 中文系，阿芬 Δ Δ 英文系。

#3 Evidence for empty verbs

An empty verb approach is superior to a Move+Delete approach

- It explains why the adjunct-included reading is unavailable.
 - Adjuncts are not deleted via VPE.
 - There is no empty adjunct in the language (Xu 2003).
- It follows that Pseudogapping-like sentences in Cantonese do not allow an adjunct-inclusive reading.

- (26) a. 阿明可以 [一口氣 做 50 下掌上壓] ,
 佢個仔可以 $\emptyset_{係}$ 30 下。
- b. 不過中間要休息吓。

#3 Evidence for empty verbs

- It also explains why the following is acceptable, if empty verbs can replace a verb and the associating suffix.

(27) a. 呢本書，阿明 睇得 好慢，佢個仔 Δ [好快]

b. 呢碗酸辣湯，阿明 食到 狂咳，佢個仔 Δ [流晒鼻水]

- cf. This is the case for aspect markers.

(28) 阿明 食咗 兩碗飯，佢個仔 Δ_v 三碗。

#3 Evidence for empty verbs

- It accounts for the ban on Pseudogapping after control predicates:

- (29) a. *阿明 想 買 三本書，阿芬淨係想 $\emptyset_{\text{係}}$ / 係 兩本書。
- b. *阿明決定 學 兩種語言，阿芬決定 $\emptyset_{\text{係}}$ / 係 三種語言。
- c. *阿明識 去 圖書館，阿芬識 $\emptyset_{\text{係}}$ / 係 體育館。

- They are unacceptable because they cannot be followed by a copula, unlike modals.

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Concluding remarks I

Our stances are:

- Cantonese **gapping**-like construction
 \neq English **gapping** (following Tang 2001)
- Cantonese **PG**-like construction
 \neq English **PG**
- Cantonese **gapping**-like construction
 $=$ Cantonese **PG**-like construction
 - Both involve **empty verbs**.

Concluding remarks II

- Our arguments involve:
 - Over- and undergeneration of Move+Delete
 - Independent constraints on empty verbs
 - “Gappability” of modals and multiple verbs
 - No PG after control verbs

Acknowledgments

- We thank Athulya Aravind, Daniel Hole, Alexander Wimmer, Jim Wood, Ka-Fai Yip, for constructive discussions and comments on this project.

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