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# Cantonese Equative Constructions in Typological Perspective

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What are Equative Constructions?

# Equative Constructions

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- “Equative constructions express situations in which two referents have a gradable property to the same degree.” (Haspelmath et al. 2017: 10)

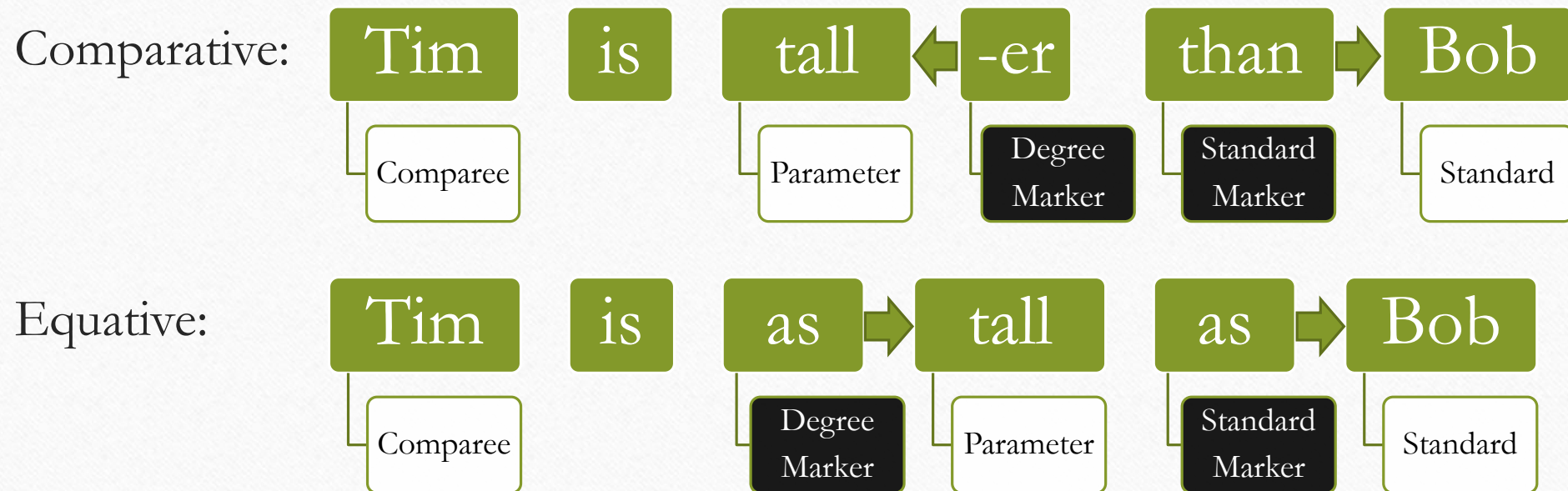
e.g. ‘Tim is as tall as Bob.’

‘Tim’ and ‘Bob’ have the gradable property ‘tallness’ to the same degree.

- Also known as comparative constructions of equality

# Equative Constructions

- Similar to comparative constructions: (1) Comparee (2) Standard (3) Parameter



Haspelmath et al. (2017):  
Typology and Generalizations of Equative  
Constructions in the World's Languages

# Typology of Equative Constructions in the World's Languages (Haspelmath et al. 2017)

- 
- |           |                      |                           |
|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| • Type 1: | only standard marker | “Kim is tall [like Pat].” |
|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------|
- 
- |           |                                       |                                   |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Type 2: | degree marker<br>&<br>standard marker | “Kim is [equally tall] [as Pat].” |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
- 
- |           |   |                                     |
|-----------|---|-------------------------------------|
| • Type 3: | unified comparee and standard<br>&<br>degree marker | “[Kim and Pat] are [equally tall].” |
|-----------|---|-------------------------------------|
- 
- |           |                                    |                                       |
|-----------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Type 4: | ‘reach/equal’ as primary predicate | “Kim [reaches/equals Pat] in height.” |
|-----------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
- 
- |           |  |  |
|-----------|--|--|
| • Type 5: | ‘reach/equal’ as primary predicate<br>&<br>unified comparee and standard | “[Kim and Pat] are equal (to each other) in height.” |
|-----------|--|--|
- 
- |           |                                      |  |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Type 6: | ‘reach/equal’ as secondary predicate | “Kim is tall [reaching/equaling Pat].” |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|
-

# Generalizations of Equative Constructions in the World's Languages (Haspelmath et al. 2017)

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## Missing pattern

- Generalization 1: No language has only a degree-marker, leaving the standard unmarked (“Kim is [equally tall] Pat”).

## Word order (for Type 1 & Type 2)

- Generalization 2: If the parameter follows the standard, then the language generally has dominant object-verb order.
- Generalization 3: If the standard precedes the parameter, then the standard-marker generally follows the standard, and if the standard follows the parameter, then the standard-marker generally precedes the standard.

# What Types of Equative Constructions Exist in Cantonese?

# Cantonese Type 2 Equative Construction

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- degree marker & standard marker  
(x2)

我嚟日同你一樣咁忙。

*ngo5 cam4jat6 tung4 nei5 jat1joeng6 gam3 mong4*

I yesterday with you equally so busy

SM DM1 DM2

‘I was as busy as you yesterday.’

# Cantonese Type 3 Equative Construction

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- unified comparee and standard & degree marker  
(x2)

[我同你]／[我哋]一樣咁忙。

*ngo5 tung4 nei5 / ngo5dei6 jat1joeng6 gam3 mong4*

[I and you] [we] equally so busy

CS DM1 DM2

‘You and me / we are equally busy.’

# Cantonese Type 6-Like Equative Construction

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- ‘reach/equal’ as secondary predicate (+ degree marker x2)  
(>‘resemble’)

佢好似你一樣咁好人。

*keoi5 hou2ci5 nei5 jat1joeng6 gam3 hou2jan4*

s/he resemble you equally so nice

‘R/E’V DM1 DM2

‘S/he is as nice as you.’

- Peyraube (2018): a new type

# Cantonese Equative Construction with the ‘Have’ Verb

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我個細女有張枱咁高喇。

*ngo5 go3 sai3 neoi2 jau5 zoeng1 toi2 gam3 goul laa3*  
I CLF young daughter have CLF table so tall SFP  
‘HAVE’V DM

‘My younger daughter is as tall as a table now.’

- See also Chao (1968) and Peyraube (2018)

# Cantonese Equative Construction with Only Degree Marking

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佢豬咁蠢。

*keoi5 zyul gam3 ceon2*

s/he pig so stupid

DM

‘S/he is as stupid as a pig.’

Does Cantonese Conform to  
the Generalizations of Equative Constructions?

# Generalizations of Equative Constructions in the World's Languages (Haspelmath et al. 2017)

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## Missing pattern

- Generalization 1: No language has only a degree-marker, leaving the standard unmarked (“Kim is [equally tall] Pat”).

## Word order (for Type 1 & Type 2)

- Generalization 2: If the parameter follows the standard, then the language generally has dominant object-verb order.
- Generalization 3: If the standard precedes the parameter, then the standard-marker generally follows the standard, and if the standard follows the parameter, then the standard-marker generally precedes the standard.

Cantonese does not conform to all these generalizations

## Generalization 2: Word Order (for Type 1 & Type 2)

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- If the parameter follows the standard, then the language generally has dominant object-verb order.

Cantonese type 2 equative:

我嚟日同你一樣咁忙。

*ngo5 cam4jat6 tung4 nei5 jat1joeng6 gam3 mong4*

I yesterday with you equally so busy

SM DM1 DM2

‘I was as busy as you yesterday.’

➤ Cantonese is a V-O language.

## Generalization 3: Word Order (for Type 1 & Type 2)

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- If the standard precedes the parameter, then the standard-marker generally follows the standard, and if the standard follows the parameter, then the standard-marker generally precedes the standard.

Cantonese type 2 equative:

我嚟日同你一樣咁忙。

*ngo5 cam4jat6 tung4 nei5 jat1joeng6 gam3 mong4*

I yesterday with you equally so busy

SM DM1 DM2

‘I was as busy as you yesterday.’

# Word Order of Cantonese Type 2 Equative: Exceptional but Expected

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- The exceptional word order seems a pan-Sinitic phenomenon.
- Haspelmath et al. (2017) notice the exceptional word order of Sinitic languages.
  - “Not surprisingly, the Chinese languages are exceptions to this generalization, as they are also exceptional with respect to other word-order generalizations.” (Haspelmath et al. 2017: 26)
  - See Dryer (2003) for discussion of other unusual aspects of Sinitic word order.

# Generalization 1: Missing pattern

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- No language has only a degree-marker, leaving the standard unmarked (“Kim is [equally tall] Pat”).
  - “This is quite surprising, and we have no explanation for the generalization.” (Haspelmath et al. 2017: 25)
- Equatives with only a degree marker are logically possible but virtually unattested.
  - Equatives with only a standard marker (i.e. Type 1) are common in the world’s languages.

# Generalization 1: Missing pattern

- No language has only a degree-marker, leaving the standard unmarked (“Kim is [equally tall] Pat”).

Cantonese equative with only degree marking:

佢豬咁蠢。

*keoi5 zyul gam3 ceon2*

s/he pig so stupid

DM

‘S/he is as stupid as a pig.’

今日冰河時期咁凍。

*gam1jat6 bing1ho4 si4kei4 gam3 dung3*

today glacier period so cold

DM

‘Today is as cold as the glacial period.’

# More Details of the Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking

# Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking: Demonstrative of Degree

- 咁 *gam3* is a demonstrative of degree (like *so* in English; 這麼、那麼 in Mandarin; こんなに、そんなに、あんなに in Japanese)
  - Demonstratives of degree and manner are commonly used as equative degree markers in European languages

佢豬咁蠢。

<i>keoi5</i>	<i>zyu1</i>	<i>gam3</i>	<i>ceon2</i>
s/he	pig	so	stupid
		DM	

‘S/he is as stupid as a pig.’

今日冰河時期咁凍。

<i>gam1jat6</i>	<i>bing1ho4</i>	<i>si4kei4</i>	<i>gam3</i>	<i>dung3</i>
today	glacier	period	so	cold
			DM	

‘Today is as cold as the glacial period.’

# Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking: No Coordinate Relation

- The comparee and the standard are juxtaposed in the surface structure but they are not in a coordinate relation; otherwise the equative belongs to type 3.

佢豬咁蠢。

*keoi5 zyul1 gam3 ceon2*  
s/he pig so stupid  
DM

\*佢同豬咁蠢。

\**keoi5 tung4 zyul1 gam3 ceon2*  
s/he and pig so stupid

‘S/he is as stupid as a pig.’

今日冰河時期咁凍。

*gam1jat6 bing1ho4 si4kei4 gam3 dung3*  
today glacier period so cold  
DM

\*今日同冰河時期咁凍。

\**gam1jat6 tung4 bing1ho4 si4kei4 gam3 dung3*  
today and glacier period so cold

‘Today is as cold as the glacial period.’

# Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking: No Coordinate Relation

- The comparee and the standard are juxtaposed in the surface structure but they are not in a coordinate relation; otherwise the equative belongs to type 3.

佢豬咁蠢。

*keoi5 zyul gam3 ceon2*  
s/he pig so stupid  
DM

\*豬佢咁蠢。

\**zyul keoi5 gam3 ceon2*  
pig s/he so stupid

‘S/he is as stupid as a pig.’

今日冰河時期咁凍。

*gam1jat6 bing1ho4 si4kei4 gam3 dung3*  
today glacier period so cold  
DM

\*冰河時期今日咁凍。

\**bing1ho4 si4kei4 gam1jat6 gam3 dung3*  
glacier period today so cold

‘Today is as cold as the glacial period.’

# Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking: Describing a High Degree

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- This Cantonese equative is limited to exaggeratedly describing a high degree of the property (specified by the predicate) that the comparee has, by saying the comparee has the property to the same degree as a standard that is a typical thing with a extremely high degree of the property.

E.g.	<b>Knowledge</b>	Pigs are very stupid. (culture-dependent)	The glacial period is very cold.
	<b>By saying</b>	‘S/he is as stupid as a pig.’	‘Today is as cold as the glacial period.’
	<b>What is meant</b>	‘S/he is very stupid.’	‘Today is very cold.’

# Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking: Describing a High Degree

---

今日冰河時期咁凍。

*gam1jat6 bing1ho4 si4kei4 gam3 dung3*

today glacier period so cold

DM

‘Today is as cold as the glacial period.’

\*今日噶日咁凍。

*\*gam1jat6 cam4jat6 gam3 dung3*

today yesterday so cold

Intended: ‘Today is as cold as yesterday.’

# Cantonese Equative with Only Degree Marking: 'Ghost' as the Standard

- 鬼 *gwai2* 'ghost' can be used as the high-degree standard for any gradable property.

條毛巾鬼咁濕／乾。

*tiu4 mou4gan1 gwai2 gam3 sap1 / gon1*

CLF towel ghost so wet dry

'The towel is very wet/dry.' (Lit. 'The towel is as wet/dry as a ghost.')

- Other types of equatives in Cantonese do not allow this use of 鬼 *gwai2* 'ghost'.

# Do Other Sinitic Languages Allow Equatives with Only Degree Marking?

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- Further investigation is needed to clarify this issue.
  - Not allowed in Standard Mandarin

\*他豬那麼／一樣笨。

\**tā zhū nàme / yīyàng bèn*

s/he pig so equally stupid

Intended: 'S/he is as stupid as a pig.'

\*今天冰河時期那麼／一樣冷。

\**jīntiān bīnghé shíqī nàme / yīyàng lěng*

today glacier period so equally cold

Intended: 'Today is as cold as the glacial period.'

# Comparison of Equative Degree Marking in Cantonese and Mandarin

# Some Observations on Equative Degree Marking in Cantonese

- Cantonese equative constructions may contain two degree markers.

- Adverbial ‘Equally’
- Demonstrative of Degree
- Which is compulsory? Both? None?

佢好似你一樣咁好人。

*keoi5 hou2ci5 nei5 jat1joeng6 gam3 hou2jan4*  
s/he resemble you equally so nice  
‘R/E’V DM1 DM2

‘S/he is as nice as you.’

我噶日同你一樣咁忙。

*ngo5 cam4jat6 tung4 nei5 jat1joeng6 gam3 mong4*  
I yesterday with you equally so busy  
SM DM1 DM2

‘I was as busy as you yesterday.’

[我同你]／[我哋]一樣咁忙。

*ngo5 tung4 nei5 / ngo5dei6 jat1joeng6 gam3 mong4*  
[I and you] [we] equally so busy  
CS DM1 DM2

‘You and me / we are equally busy.’

# Degree Marking in Type 2 Equatives

- Cantonese: ‘Equally’ & Degree Demonstrative

貓仔其實同狗仔 { \*∅ / \*一樣 / \*咁 / 一樣咁 } 得意。

*maaulzai2 kei4sat6 tung4 gau2zai2 { \*∅ / \*jat1joeng6 / \*gam3 / jat1joeng6 gam3 } dak1ji3*

kitten actually with puppy equally so equally so cute

‘Kittens are actually as cute as puppies.’

- Mandarin: ‘Equally’

小貓其實跟小狗 { \*∅ / 一樣 / \*那麼 / ?一樣那麼 } 可愛。

*xiǎomāo qíshí gēn xiǎogǒu { \*∅ / yīyàng / \*nàme / ?yīyàng nàme } kě'ài*

kitten actually with puppy equally so equally so cute

‘Kittens are actually as cute as puppies.’

# Degree Marking in Type 3 Equatives

- Cantonese: ‘Equally’ & Degree Demonstrative

貓仔（同）狗仔 { \*∅ / \*一樣 / \*咁 / 一樣咁 } 得意。

*maau1zai2 (tung4) gau2zai2 { \*∅ / \*jat1joeng6 / \*gam3 / jat1joeng6 gam3 } dak1ji3*

kitten and puppy equally so equally so cute

‘Kittens and puppies are equally cute.’

- Mandarin: ‘Equally’

小貓（跟）小狗 { \*∅ / 一樣 / \*那麼 / ?一樣那麼 } 可愛。

*xiǎomāo (gēn) xiǎogǒu { \*∅ / yīyàng / \*nàme / ?yīyàng nàme } kě'ài*

kitten and puppy equally so equally so cute

‘Kittens and puppies are equally cute.’

# Degree Marking in Type 6-Like Equatives

- Cantonese: ('Equally') & Degree Demonstrative

細佬好似哥哥 { \*Ø / \*一樣 / 咁 / 一樣咁 } 叻。

*sai3lou2          hou2ci5   go4go1          { \*Ø / \*jat1joeng6 / gam3 / jat1joeng6 gam3 } lek1*  
younger.brother resemble elder.brother          equally          so          equally          so          capable

'The younger brother is as capable as the elder brother.'

- Mandarin: 'Equally' / Degree Demonstrative

弟弟像哥哥 { \*Ø / 一樣 / 那麼 / \*一樣那麼 } 能幹。

*dìdì          xiàng          gēge          { \*Ø / yīyàng / nàme / \*yīyàng nàme } nénggàn*  
younger.brother resemble elder.brother          equally          so          equally          so          capable

'The younger brother is as capable as the elder brother.'

# Degree Marking in Equatives with the ‘Have’ Verb

- Cantonese: Degree Demonstrative

嗰條蟲有手掌 { \*∅ / \*一樣 / 咁 / ?一樣咁 } 長。

go2 tiu4 cung4 jau5 sau2zoeng2 { \*∅ / \*jat1joeng6 / gam3 / ?jat1joeng6 gam3 } coeng4

that CLF worm have palm equally so equally so long

‘The worm as long as a palm.’

- Mandarin: (‘Equally’ / Degree Demonstrative)

那條蟲有手掌 { ∅ / 一樣 / 那麼 / \*一樣那麼 } 長。

nà tiáo chóng yǒu shǒuzhǎng { ∅ / yīyàng / nàme / \*yīyàng nàme } cháng

that CLF worm have palm equally so equally so long

‘The worm as long as a palm.’

# Degree Marking in Equatives with Only Degree Marking

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- Cantonese: ('Equally') & Degree Demonstrative

間房火爐 { \*∅ / \*一樣 / 咁 / 一樣咁 } 熱。

*gaan1 fong2 fo2lou4 { \*∅ / \*jat1joeng6 / gam3 / jat1joeng6 gam3 } jit6*

CLF room furnace equally so equally so hot

‘The room is as hot as a furnace.’

- Mandarin: Not allow this type of equative

# Differences in Equative Degree Marking between Cantonese and Mandarin

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	Type 2	Type 3	Type 6-Like	Only DM	'Have'
Cantonese	E & D		(E) & D		D
Mandarin	E		E / D	*	(E / D)

Note: E = 'Equally' ; D = Degree Demonstrative

# Logical Types of Equative Degree Marking

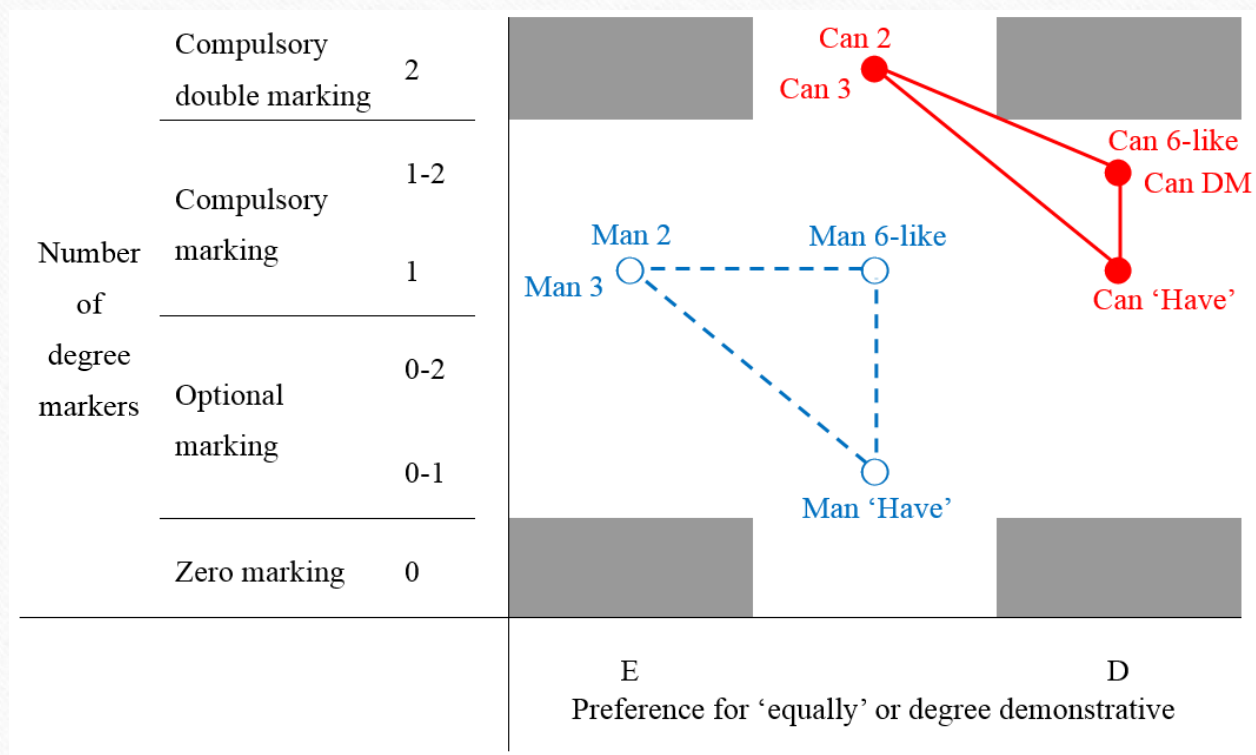
Number of degree markers	Compulsory double marking	2		E&D	
	Compulsory marking	1-2	E&(D)	E  D	(E)&D
		1	E	E/D	D
	Optional marking	0-2	(D⊃E)	(E  D) (E&D)	(E⊃D)
		0-1	(E)	(E/D)	(D)
	Zero marking	0		∅	
			E	D	
			Preference for ‘equally’ or degree demonstrative		

Total 15 logical types

Assumptions:

- Only 2 forms:  
'equally' and degree demonstrative
- No reoccurrences of any form

# Equative Degree Marking in Cantonese and Mandarin



Thank you!

ありがとうございます。

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