

A Comparison of Incremental Interactions and Parallel Patterns in Cantonese and Vietnamese

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Cantonese and Vietnamese are two languages that display rich incremental inventories, and although unrelated, their incrementals (INCs) share notable resemblances in syntax and pragmatics. From a functionalist perspective, this presentation compares the individual features of INCs and their interactions within each language and across the two. Along the way, it also illustrates how four-way colexification (Incrementality, Comparison, Continuation (Thomas 2018), and Repetition) is possible in both languages with striking parallels. Though sharing many similarities, Cantonese and Vietnamese do have distinctions of their own. In general, Cantonese employs a wider range of five lexical items to convey nuances of incrementality, while this role is much more concentrated in Vietnamese, with only three. Aside from their relevant pragmatics, these morphemes also carry non-incremental meanings. When multiple INCs interact within a sentence, incrementality is often assigned to “basic INCs” while others would contribute their non-incremental meanings to the utterance as a result of blocking. Because they are highly lexical, INCs are non-procedural parts of the sentence and thus, can be omitted at times depending on focus. Finally, parallels across grammatical operations are observed even in extreme conditions, especially with post-predicates and the related double-INC structures.