

## A UNIFIED STUDY OF VERBAL AND ADJECTIVAL *-HAA5* IN CANTONESE

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### ABSTRACT

*-Haa5* (吓) ‘a bit’ is a frequently used affix attached to verbal and adjectival phrases in Cantonese. The investigation of the distributions, grammatical properties and functions of *-haa5* reveals that all usages of *-haa5* are derived from its original meaning ‘a stroke, a bit, or a tiny amount’. The distributions of *-haa5* are highly restricted: predicates eligible to co-occur with *-haa5* are verbs/adjectives with an innate event/degree argument, excluding those whose semantics are of extreme/polarity reading. The function of *-haa5* is to delimit events when following verb phrases (henceforth VPs) and make slight adjustments of degree when attached to adjective phrases (henceforth APs). Moreover, *-haa5* is of the function of subjectivity encoding. *-Haa5* has been grammaticalized from a verb classifier, event delimiter/degree adjuster to

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a subjectivity marker and is syntactically at the left periphery of the extended projection of predicative lexical categories.

## KEYWORDS

Cantonese *-haa5* 吓 Event Degree Subjectivity Left-peripheral marker

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*-Haa5* is an affix attached to verbal (1a) and adjectival elements (1b) in Hong Kong and Guangzhou Cantonese. It occurs frequently on casual occasions like daily conversations, street interviews, or personal comments rather than in formal contexts such as official announcements, business communications and important rituals, as exemplified in (1):

(1) a. 阿 May 约 我 坐 吓。 (verb)<sup>1</sup>

Aa3mei1 joek3 ngo5 co5 haa5.

A-May invite 1SG sit HAA5

'A-May invites me to sit down (for tea).'

b. 今日 几 热 吓。 (adjective)

Gam1jat6 gei2 jit6 haa5.

today rather hot HAA5

'It is rather hot today.'

Generally, scholars agree that the original reading of *-haa5* is "a stroke" (cf. Bai 1998; Peng 2000, 2010; Wang and Zhan 2007; Choo 2010; among many others). *-Haa5* is originated from a verbal classifier meaning 'once', and the V-*haa5* construction is grammaticalized from the V-*jat1-haa5* 'V-once' construction, along with the omission of the numeral *jat1* 'one' (Bai 1998; Peng 2000, 2010; Wang and Zhan 2007; Choo 2010; among many others), as demonstrated in *zong6 -haa5 go3 zung1* 'hit the bell once' (2b).

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## 粤语动词和形容词短语后缀“-吓”的统一分析

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### 摘要

“-吓”是粤语动词和形容词短语之后经常出现的一个后缀。通过对“-吓”的句法分布、语法性质和功能的研究，本文发现“-吓”的所有用法都源自其“一下”的初始意义。“-吓”的句法分布非常受限：能与“-吓”合法共现的谓词都是内含事件/程度论元的动词/形容词，并且这些谓词不能包含极限/极项意义。当附着在动词短语之后时，“-吓”的功能是切分事件，当它出现在形容词短语后时，其作用是对形容词表达的程度意义进行细微调整。除此之外，“-吓”还能表达说话者的主观判断。我们认为粤语的“-吓”已经完成了从动量词、事件切分/程度调节成分到主观性标记的语法化，它在句法上处于谓词性词汇短语扩展投射的左边界位置。

### 关键词

粤语 “-吓” 事件 程度 主观性 左缘标记