



Department of
Linguistics and Modern Languages
語言學及現代語言系

The Hows of *What* and the Whats of *How*

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Date: June 13, 2024 (Thursday)
Time: 2:30pm - 4:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)
Venue: Room 101, Leung Kau Kui Building,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Abstract

This talk explores the intuition that applicative *wh*-expressions are built upon an argumental root often encoded as a *what*-like expression not only across languages, but also across time. In the literature, there is a consensus that *why*-like and *how come*-like expressions merge high in the sentence structure across languages. As such, it becomes mysterious why the interpretations of these “very high” applicatives are typically position-driven rather than category-driven. We propose to combine insights from the Cartographic Approach and the Distributed Morphology by taking grammaticalization as an instance of “recategorization” at distinct positions along the clausal spine, and by relating various *wh*-construals to their respective “height of interpretation”. This is where we further bring in the universal spine hypothesis along the line of Wiltschko (2014), as well as Ramchand & Svenonius’s (2014) idea that the C-T-V split of generative syntax essentially encodes the ontological arrangement of proposition > situation > event. Drawing on these insights, we take the formation of *wh*-adverbials to be conditioned by their merge sites and a set of loosely organized universal hierarchies.

Speaker

Wei-Tien Dylan Tsai received his Ph.D. degree in linguistics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1994, and is currently the director and distinguished professor at the Linguistics Institute, National Tsing Hua University. He also serves as one of the editors of *International Journal of Chinese Linguistics*. His research explores issues concerning the syntax-semantics interface under the cartographic approach, with an emphasis on Chinese, Austronesian and Vietnamese languages from the perspective of comparative syntax.

All Are Welcome

Enquiries

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