

Institute for Chinese Studies Lecture

The Postverbal Constraint across Chinese Dialects

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Mendenhall Lab 174

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As an SVO language, Chinese exhibits a cluster of typologically unusual traits known collectively as the “Postverbal Constraint”. Unlike other VO languages, where VP complements and adjuncts are positioned canonically after the verb, Chinese tends to restrict more than one phrasal constituent from occurring postverbally.

This talk presents some new evidence gathered from recent large-scale survey on Chinese dialects, which indicates that the Constraint manifests itself as a scalar gradation across Sinitic varieties both geographically and syntactically, neatly in proportion to the degree of historical and current exposure to northern non-Sinitic SOV languages. The data further reveals that the constraint-continuum is not driven by simple borrowing, but formed via a series of internal adaptive adjustments that are externally motivated.

Min ZHANG is currently Associate Professor in Humanities and Director of the MA in International Language Education Program at the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology. His research interests are primarily in the fields of Chinese historical grammar, Chinese dialectology, and cognition-based functional grammar of Chinese.



Free and open to the public
easc.osu.edu/events/ics/m-zhang

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