Some Notes on gam2 and gam3 in Cantonese*

Joanna Ut-Seong SIO and Sze-Wing TANG

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the properties of the modifying indexical element gam in Cantonese. Gam appears in two different forms, with variations in tones: gam2 and gam3. Both elements have the function of ‘pointing’. Gam2 points to a property (eventual, nominal or situational) and gam3 points to a degree of a scalar property. The usages of gam2 and gam3 are illustrated below:

(1) a. Gam2 sik6 b. Gam2 ge3 jan4 c. Gam2 aa4... d. Gam3 gou1

GAM eat GAM GE people GAM SFP GAM tall
‘eat like that’ ‘people like that’ ‘if it is the case...’ ‘this tall/that tall’

Both gam2 and gam3 can point deictically and anaphorically. By deictically, we refer to a situation in which gam2/3 refers to a reference that is in the immediate non-linguistic surrounding, with the aid of demonstration. By anaphorically, we refer to a situation in which the reference of gam2/3 is established in the previous discourse. There is yet another use of gam2/3 in which case gam2/3 is preceded by a description, as illustrated in (3) and (4). The reference is then the content of the description. We refer to this situation an ‘establishing’ use of the gam2/3.

(3) a. Maan6-maan6 gam2 haang4 b. Faal faal faal faal faal gam2 ge3
naam4 jan2 slow-slow GAM walk flashy GAM GE man
‘slowly walk’ ‘flashy type of men’

(4) Zoeng1 toi2 gam3 gou1
CL table GAM tall
tall as a table

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we discuss the different usages of gam2 and show that gam2 always points to a property. The nature of the property is dependent on what gam2 is associated with and its position with respect to its associate. In section 3, we illustrate the use of gam3 in modifying adjectives, showing that it is used with gradable adjectives and it points to a degree of adjective-ness. In section 4, we discuss similarities and differences between gam2 and gam3, as well as some speculations.

2. Gam2

2.1 Event modification

2.1.1 Pre-verbal

When gam2 is followed by a Verb Phrase (VP), it behaves like a manner adverbial (Sio & Tang 2007). By manner, we refer to both method and style of action (e.g. killing someone with guns and killing someone slowly). Suppose I see someone swimming at this moment with flippers and I utter (5) with pointing. In such a case, gam2 is used deictically. Alternatively, if I tell my friend the story a few days later and he utters (5). Gam2 is then used anaphorically.

(5) Gam2 jau4-seoi2 dou1 dak1! GAM swim-water also okay
‘How can someone swim like that!’

When gam2 comes with a preceding description, the description establishes the reference of gam2. In (6), gam2 refers to the manner of having one’s mouth wide open.

(6) Keo5 maak3-dam6-hau2 gam2 jau4-seoi2 gaa3
3SG make taut-big-mouth GAM swim-water SFP
‘S/He swims with his/her mouth wide open.’

Some modifiers can combine with a VP to give rise to a manner reading without gam2. For instance, in (6), gam2 can be absent without affecting the grammaticality. There are also modifiers that need gam2 to make them into manner adverbials. For instance, without gam2, the following sentence would be ungrammatical.

(7) Peter seng4 go3 model *(gam3) haang4 lou6 gaa3
Peter as-if CL model GAM walk road SFP
‘Peter walks as if he is a model.’

This suggests that some modifiers are inherently ‘manner’ while some are not. For modifiers that are not inherently ‘manner’ in nature (the precise qualification of which needs further research), adding gam2 can give it a manner interpretation.

There are, however, a few cases in which gam2 does not only refer to manner when preceding a VP. It happens to a few complement-taking verbs like gong2 ‘say’, waak6 ‘say’, zou6 ‘do’, lam2 ‘think’ etc.,. This is illustrated below:

---

* The research reported here is conducted within the context of the project ‘A comparative study on modification strategies in Chinese and English’ (G-YX59), funded by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

1 We borrow the term ‘establishing’ from Hawkins (1978, pp. 131). He uses the term ‘referent-establishing relative clauses’ to refer to relative clauses like the woman he went out with last night, where a definite referent is established at the point the noun phrase is uttered.

2 Sio & Tang (2007) show that adverbials with gam2 and without gam2 differ in that for the former, the modification is obligatorily restrictive while the latter is optionally restrictive.

Tsai (1999) makes a similar observation based on the Mandarin counterpart of `dim2, zemme-yang, which he glosses as 'how-manner'. Consider the following contrast, taken from Tsai (1999), paying attention to the position of `emme-yang with respect to the verb chang 'sing':

(14) Akiu shang-ci zemme-yang chang-ge?
Akiu last-time how-manner sing-ge
'How did Aku sing last time?'
Answers: a. you houlong 'with throat' (method)
b. hen dasheng 'very loudly' (style of action)

(15) Ge, Akiu shang-ci chang-de zemme-yang?
song Akiu last-time sing-res how-manner
'How did Aku perform in singing last time?'
Answer: a. bu zemme-yang 'not so (good)' (resultative)
b. tai dasheng 'too loud' (style of resultant state)

Tsai (1999) treats pre-verbal zemme-yang 'how-manner' as a pre-verbal modifier and the post-verbal zemme-yang as a complement. In particular, he takes pre-verbal zemme-
yang to be modifying `v', giving rise to either method or style of action reading. He
postulates a result clause headed by the post-verbal zemme-yang, which predicates upon
a resultative event/state introduced by the resultative marker de. If the subject of the
resultative clause is an event, then the resultative reading arises. If the subject of the
resultative clause is a state, the style (of state) reading arises. We suggest that the same
structure can be applied to the Cantonese gam2 and dim2. Following Tsai (1999), we
adopt the following structure for Cantonese:

(16) vP
ty

subj `v'
ty
dim2|gam2 `v'
ty
v VP
ty
(Obj) `v'
ty
V RC (Resultative Clause)

The higher gam2|dim2 gives rise to a manner reading (method, style of action) and
the lower gam2|dim2 gives rise to an evaluation reading (resultative, style of resultant
state).
2.2 Nominal modification

2.2.1 Pre-nominal

When *gam2* appears within a nominal, it refers to a nominal property. Like most other nominal modifiers, *gam2* has to be followed by a modification marker *ge3*. As noted earlier on, when *gam2* is preceded by a description, it is used 'establishingly'. In this usage, *gam2 ge3* can appear either preceding the demonstrative, as in (17) or between the classifier and the noun, as in (18):

(17) Wan4-wan4-dei2 **gam2 ge3** go2 zung2 gam2gok3
kind-of-dizzy *GAM GE* that CL feeling
'that kind-of-dizzy-type feeling'

(18) Go2 zung2 wan4-wan4-dei2 **gam2 ge3** gam2gok3
that CL kind-of-dizzy *GAM GE* feeling
'that kind-of-dizzy-type of feeling'

The [modifier- *gam2 ge3*] string can also appear to the left of the numeral 'one', as in (19a), but with other numerals, the resulting phrase sounds very marginal as in (19b). The [modifier- *gam2 ge3*] string is focused in (19a).

(19) a. Hou2-ci5 gel *gam3 ge3* jat1 gau6 je5
like *GAM GE* one CL thing
'a piece of gel-like stuff'

b. ?? Hou2-ci5 gel *gam3 ge3* saam1 gau6 je5
like *GAM GE* three CL thing
Intended reading: 'three pieces of gel-like stuff'

When bare *gam2 ge3* appears in a phrase-initial position or between the classifier and the noun, it is interpreted deictically if it is uttered with demonstration (e.g. pointing to a dog of a peculiar quality in the surrounding) or it is interpreted anaphorically (e.g. referring to some previously mentioned quality of dogs).

(20) **Gam2 ge3** gau2 dou1 maai5?
GAM GE dog even buy
'You are buying such dogs?'

(21) Ngo5 soeng2 maai5 jat1 *zek3 gam2 ge3* gau2
1SG want buy one CL *GAM GE* dog
'I want to buy a dog of such quality.'

It is however impossible to place *gam2 ge3* to the left of the demonstrative, as shown in (22):

(22) *Gam2 ge3* go2 zek3 gau2
GAM GE that CL dog

It is possible to put bare *gam2 ge3* to the left of the numeral 'one', as in (23a), but the phrase sounds marginal with other numerals, as in (23b).

(23) a. **Gam2 ge3** jat1 go3 naam4jan2
GAM GE one CL man
'a man of such quality'

b. ?? **Gam2 ge3** jat1 baak3 go3 naam4jan2
GAM GE one hundred CL man
Intended reading: 'a hundred men of such quality'

(24) A summary of the observations is presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>α=</th>
<th>α-demonstrative</th>
<th>Classifier-α-noun</th>
<th>α-one</th>
<th>α-two, three…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[modifier- <em>gam2 ge3</em>]</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√ (with α in focus)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ <em>gam2 ge3</em>]</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√ (with α in focus)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When *gam2 ge3* modifies a nominal, it gives rise to a kind reading. As expected, individual-levels modifiers are compatible with *gam2 ge3* as in (25), but stage-level modifiers are not as in (26).

(25) Seng4-jat6 fa16 *gam2 ge3* gau2
all-day bark GAM GE dog
'this/that type of dog(s) that bark(s) all day long'

(26) *Ji1ga1 fa16-gan2 *gam2 ge3* gau2
now bark-PROG GAM GE dog
Intended reading: 'the now-barking type of dogs'

NPs denote kinds while DPs denote individuals. In order to account for the modifying-kinds reading, we assume that *gam2 ge3* is generated right on top of NP, presumably in the specifier of some projection related to modification. We have observed that for [modifier- *gam2 ge3*] strings, they can appear both to the left of the demonstrative or between the classifier and the noun. We assume that the different positions are derived by movement.
The grammaticality contrast between (30a) and (30b) suggests that gam2 gives rise to different interpretations depending on its position. In a phrase-initial position, gam2 is a pre-nominal modifier and is only restrictive. Thus it can't appear with proper names, which have rigid designations. When gam2 acts as a predicate, we treat it as the predicate of a Small Clause (SC) with NP/DP as the subject. Gam2 in this case is attributive in nature, and is thus compatible with proper names. The relevant structural differences are shown in (31) and (32).

\[
\begin{align*}
(31) & \quad \text{NP/DP} \\
& \quad \text{t}\ y \\
& \quad \text{gam2} \text{ge3 NP/DP} \\
& \quad \text{NP/DP gam2} \text{ge3}
\end{align*}
\]

2.3 ‘Situational’ use

When gam2 is not followed or preceded by anything, it refers to the property of a situation. In (33), gam2 refers to the situation that A has got no cash. It is interpreted anaphorically. Gam2 can also be interpreted deictically if A, instead of saying he has no money, shows an empty wallet to B. Gam2 is not used establishingly when referring to the property of a situation.

\[
\begin{align*}
(33) \text{A: Ngo5 mou5} \text{ daai3 cin2 tim1} \\
& \quad 1SG \text{ NEG bring money} \text{ SFP} \\
& \quad \text{GAM SFP, 1SG give first SFP} \\
& \quad \text{‘I forgot to bring any cash.’} \\
& \quad \text{‘In that case, I will pay first.’}
\end{align*}
\]

3. Gam3

Gam3 is always followed by a gradable adjective. Let X be the adjective, [gam3-X] refers to a degree of X-ness. It combines equally well with open-scale and closed-scale adjectives. It can be used deictically, with demonstration accompanying the utterance as in (34). It can also be used anaphorically as shown in (35). When gam3 is combined with a non-gradable adjective, it is uninterpretable, as in (36).

\[
\begin{align*}
(34) & \quad \text{Gam3 mun5 laa1} \\
& \quad \text{GAM full SFP} \\
& \quad \text{‘this full’ (with the index finger touching the side of a beer glass)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(35) & \quad \text{A: Tiu4 sing2 jau5 naam} \text{lam5, gam3 coeng4 (open-scale adjective)} \\
& \quad \text{CL rope have three meter GAM long} \\
& \quad \text{‘The rope is three meters long.’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \quad \text{B: Gam3 coeng4 dou1 m4 gau3 bo3} \\
& \quad \text{GAM long still NEG enough SFP} \\
& \quad \text{‘That is still not long enough.’}
\end{align*}
\]
In addition to a degree reading, gam3 can have an intensifying meaning on top of the degree reading, meaning ‘very’, as in (37). It, however, cannot be used alone to mean ‘very’ without the indexical meaning, as in (38).

(37) Go3 maam4zai2 gam3 goul ge2
    CL  boy  GAM  tall  SFP
'The boy is so tall.'

(38) "Ngo5 m4 zi1 keoi5 jau5 gsei2 goul1,
    1SG  NEG  know  3SG  have  tall
daan ngo5 zi keoi5 gam3 goul1
but  1SG  know  3SG  GAM  tall
Intended reading: ‘I don’t know how tall he is (in measurement), but I know he is very tall.'

When there is a preceding description, only the indexical reading is possible.

(39) Saam1 mai5 gam3 goul
    three  meter  GAM  tall
'three meters tall'

Note that in (39), gam3 can be absent. The meaning does not alter much. However, there are degree modifiers that cannot modify the adjective directly without gam3, as in (40).

(40) Zoeng1 toi2 gam3 goul
    CL  table  GAM  tall
'tall like a table'

What this suggests is that, similar to the use of gam2 in manner modification of events, there are modifiers that are inherently degree-like. For these modifiers, gam3 is not needed to mediate the relationship between the modifier and the adjective. For those modifiers that are not degree-like, gam3 can be used to make them into degree-modifiers.

4. Gam2 and gam3: Similarities, Differences and Cross-linguistic Relevance

Gam2 and gam3 are both indexical elements that can be used deictically, anaphorically and establishingly. Another interesting similarity between gam2 and gam3 lies in their establishing use. In manner modification of event, for modifiers that cannot combine with the VP directly, gam2 makes them into legitimate manner adverbials. Similarly, in degree modification, for modifiers that cannot combine with an adjective directly to denote a degree, gam3 makes them into legitimate adjectival degree modifiers. In other words, gam2 and gam3 alter the nature of the preceding description in such a way that they can modify an event and the degree of an adjective respectively.

With respect to their differences, gam2 and gam3 differ in that gam2 refers to a property while gam3 refers to a degree of a property denoted by an adjective. The difference in the reference is not only reflected in their tones. Gam2 can always be followed by an associative noun joeng2 ‘appearance’ while gam3 cannot (Sio & Tang 2007).

(41) a. Gam2 joeng2
    b. Gam3 (*joeng2)

In other words, the modification relation between gam2 and the modifier (e.g. VP, NP, etc.) is direct. Gam2 ascribes a property to joeng2 ‘appearance’ and gam2 joeng2 as a whole ascribes a property to the event or the nominal. Furthermore, as is shown, gam2 (joeng2) can appear in different environments while gam3, on the other hand, always appears with an adjective.

Having one and the same indexical element to refer to nominal/verbal properties and degree is not merely a Cantonese idiosyncrasy. In fact, many languages use identical indexical elements to refer to nominal/verbal properties and degree, for instance, the Czech tak, the Dutch zo, etc. (see also Landman & Morzycki 2003 for discussion in Polish, Russian and German). Some illustrative Czech examples are provided below:4

(42) (a) Tak tančí.
    (b) Takový muž
    (c) Tak
        TAK  dance.3SG.PRES  TAK-M.NOM  man.M.NOM  TAK
        'dance in such a way'  'such a man'  'It is the case.'

(d) Tak (hle) velký
    (e) Tak velký
        TAK(see) big.M.NOM  TAK  big.M.NOM
        'this big' (with demonstration)  'so big' (exclamation)

Another similar example is the English such as in such is life and such a lovely house, which seems to have both a referential/demonstrative-like usage (referring to a property) and an intensifying usage (Wood 2002 and references therein). This cross-linguistic robustness suggests the usage of the same indexical element in these environments is not a co-incident. The remaining questions are how these different environments are related and what functional category should be assigned to such elements. We leave these questions for further research.

---

3 The measurement seems to be more precise when gam3 is absent.

4 We are grateful to František Kratochvíl for the Czech data.
Acknowledgements

The research reported here is conducted within the context of the project ‘A comparative study on modification strategies in Chinese and English’ (G-YX59), funded by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

References


