



Workshop on Definiteness in Chinese

- Date:** December 21, 2010 (Tuesday)
Time: 2:30pm ~ 6:00pm
Venue: Lai Chan Pui Ngong Lecture Theater
Y. C. Liang Hall (LHC)
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Research Centre for Cantonese
Department of Chinese Language and Literature
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

(Version 1.0)



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Time	Speakers	Titles
Session 1	Chair: Ben AU YEUNG (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)	
2:30pm - 3:15pm**	Dingxu SHI The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	What Marks the Definiteness in a Chinese Nominal Phrase?
3:15pm - 4:00pm	Qingwen ZHANG & Sze-Wing TANG Guangdong University of Foreign Studies & The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Classifiers, Modifiers and Definiteness across Chinese Dialects
4:00pm - 4:30pm	Coffee Break	
Session 2	Chair: Yang GU (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)	
4:30pm - 5:15pm	Thomas Hun-tak LEE The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Referentiality and Nominal Structure in Early Child Cantonese: a Comparative Exploration
5:15pm - 6:00pm	Andrew SIMPSON University of Southern California	The Definite Bare Classifier Construction: a Cross-linguistic Study

**There will be 30-minutes for each presentation plus 15 minutes for discussion.

Website: <http://www.chi.cuhk.edu.hk/rcc>

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Referentiality and Nominal Structure in Early Child Cantonese: a Comparative Exploration

Thomas Hun-tak LEE

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In Cheng and Sybesma (1999), the salient differences between Cantonese and Mandarin with respect to nominal structure are subsumed under a general difference, i.e. the hypothesis that Cantonese classifiers can occur overtly without a numeral, whereas Mandarin classifiers require the co-presence of a numeral, overt or covert. Their analysis can account for a range of salient facts observed in earlier studies (Cheung 1972, 1989; Leung 1980; Auyeung 1997), namely, the use of 'classifier-noun' for definite reference in Cantonese but not in Mandarin; the use of bare nouns for definite reference in Mandarin but not in Cantonese; and the generic use of the classifier. The more elaborate extension of their analysis in Sio (2006) further captures the availability of 'XP-classifier-noun' nominals in Cantonese but not in Mandarin, by postulating a Specificity phrase, conditions such as the visibility condition, and drawing a distinction between marker modifiers and bare modifiers.

If the formal analyses are to be understood as formulations of parametric variation of nominal structure, they would also need to account for two other systematic differences between the two languages: (a) the existence of 'demonstrative' and 'demonstrative-noun' nominals in Mandarin but not in Cantonese; and (b) the fact that headless nominals with marker modifiers (the 'XP-de' nominals) can be used both referentially and non-referentially in Mandarin, whereas their counterparts in Cantonese (the 'XP-ge' nominals) are limited to non-referential uses, as observed by Lee and Yiu (1998). These formal proposals will also have to tackle the question how children tune in to these parametric differences in early stages of grammatical development, given the poverty of stimulus. Whether these differences can be acquired early is relevant to how we understand the acquisition of (in)definiteness, in light of the controversies surrounding this issue in the acquisition literature (cf. Maratsos 1976, Karmiloff-Smith 1979, Warden 1981, Penner and Weissenborn 1996, Marinis 2003, Schaffer and de Villiers 2000), and in view of empirical findings suggesting late acquisition of (in)definiteness by Mandarin-speaking and Cantonese-speaking children (Hickman and Liang 1990, Lee and Szeto 1993).

This paper explores the structure and referentiality of early nominals in child Cantonese by comparing it to those of child Mandarin, based on longitudinal data from around 1 year 5 months to 2 years 3 months. Our findings show that children's sensitivity to the referential status of bare nouns is most robustly reflected in the preponderance of headless nominals with marker modifiers in child Mandarin, but not in Cantonese, and the emergence of 'DP-classifier-noun' structures in child Cantonese but not in child Mandarin.

What Marks the Definiteness in a Chinese Nominal Phrase?

Dingxu SHI

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Ever since Abney (1987) put forward the DP-hypothesis, DP has become a much debated issue in the study of Chinese syntax. Although there is still argument against the existence of D and its maximal projection DP in Chinese (e.g., Zhou 2006, Zhang 2010), the debate is mainly conducted under the assumption that there is DP in Chinese, and focused on what the Chinese DP dominates and what the internal structure of DP is (e.g., Si 2006, Huang et al 2008). Three issues will be discussed in this paper with regard to the internal structure of Chinese DP: (a) what is under D, and whether the marker *DE* should be considered D, (b) which element in a nominal phrase encodes the definiteness, and (c) whether a Chinese DP could have a doubly-filled D.

The Definite Bare Classifier Construction: a Cross-linguistic Study

Andrew SIMPSON

University of Southern California

One now well-known difference between Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese in the area of nominal syntax is that Cantonese allows for (and frequently requires) the use of a bare classifier with nouns in instances of definite reference where Mandarin only permits a bare NP:

(1) bou syu hai bin dou aa?
CL book be where QP
'Where is the book?'

(2) (*ben) shu zai na-li a?
CL book be where QP
'Where is the book?'

Cheng and Sybesma (1999) use this striking difference between Cantonese and Mandarin to build a theory of the structure of nominal phrases in Chinese, in which classifiers in Cantonese are considered to be determiner-like and cause the projection of CIPs rather than DPs in nominals interpreted as definite, whereas Mandarin bare nouns project a larger DP structure. Such a hypothesis of the surface difference between Cantonese and Mandarin has recently been criticized in Wu and Bodomo (2009), who argue for a universal DP analysis of both Mandarin and Cantonese in cases of definite bare NPs in Mandarin and classifier + noun sequences in Cantonese. The theory constructed to account for Cantonese and Mandarin in Cheng and Sybesma (1999) also faces a clear challenge from varieties of Chinese such as the Wenzhou dialect, as conceded in Cheng and Sybesma (2005). The former work proposes an account of Mandarin/Cantonese which does not allow for any optionality in structure projection and forces the consistent use of either a bare noun/NP (Mandarin) or a classifier + noun/NP sequence (Cantonese). However, both such strategies occur with definite nominals in Wenzhou, necessitating a re-thinking of the strict and automatic mapping between the lexicon and syntactic structures in different varieties of Chinese.

Although the distinctive occurrence of definite classifier + noun pairs in Cantonese (and Wenzhou) is sometimes thought to be a special, rather idiosyncratic pattern found in these varieties of Chinese, it is actually a pattern which occurs rather more widely than is often assumed, being (at least sporadically) attested in several other language families present in Asia. This paper presents a cross-linguistic comparison of the definite bare classifier construction/DBCC, with extended parallel data gathered from Cantonese (Sinitic), Vietnamese (Mon-Khmer), Hmong (Hmong-Mien) and Bengali (Indic). All these genetically unrelated languages make highly robust use of DBCCs, and the latter three furthermore exhibit the challenging optional alternation between DBCCs and definite bare noun forms found in the Wenzhou dialect of Chinese. Probing Cantonese further than in previous studies, alongside Hmong, Vietnamese and Bengali, the paper examines whether DBCCs occur in a parallel way with the following range of definite interpretations found in languages with articles, or whether they are necessarily replaced by other structures: (a) discourse anaphoric definite readings (John has a dog and a cat. The dog is very loud.) (b) non-anaphoric 'visible definiteness' (Pass me the camera), (c) 'inferable definiteness' (We went to a wedding yesterday. The bride was very beautiful.) (d) culturally unique, non-visible, non-inferable definiteness (The president has died). Considering the informational status of semantically definite nominal expressions, and the effects of discourse prominence, referent activation, argument/adjunct distinctions, and the role of contrast, the paper also attempts to clarify whether the alternation between DBCCs and Mandarin-like bare NPs really is optional in those varieties/languages which exhibit such alternations, or whether the form of nominals can in fact be predicted from certain discourse related phenomena. The results of the comparative study provide a more comprehensive descriptive base for theoretical analyses of the DBCC and a better understanding of the degree to which Cantonese is or is not significantly different from other languages with DBCCs.

Cheng, Lisa Lai-Shen and Rint Sybesma. (1999) Bare and not-so-bare nouns and the structure of NP. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30:509-542

Cheng, Lisa Lai-Shen and Rint Sybesma. (2005) Classifiers in four varieties of Chinese. In *The Oxford handbook of comparative syntax* (eds. G. Cinque and R. Kayne), Oxford University Press, 259-292.

Wu, Yicheng and Adams Bodomo. (2009) Classifiers ≠ Determiners. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40:487-503.

Classifiers, Modifiers and Definiteness across Chinese Dialects

Qingwen ZHANG

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

Sze-Wing TANG

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In this study, we would like to investigate the distribution and interpretation of the CI-NP phrases in a number of Chinese dialects, such as Hong Kong Cantonese (Yue family), Hezhou (Yue family), Kaijian (Yue family), Shaodong (Xiang family), Pingyang (Wu family), and Lujiang (Jianghuai Mandarin), where the CI-NP phrases can denote two distinctive interpretations: indefinite vs. definite. Though both definite and indefinite readings are available for CI-NP phrases in the dialects concerned, supersegmental devices such as tone sandhi and stress are observed in some of them to distinguish the two readings. The fact that indefiniteness is encoded in the default form and definiteness in the marked form suggests that classifiers are not capable of encoding definiteness themselves. Parametric variation is observed with respect to co-occurrence of marker modifiers and CI-NP phrases. The variation in co-occurrence of marker modifiers and CI-NPs suggests the distinctive underlying structures of nominal phrases in the dialects concerned as well as the different nature of the classifier and the modification marker.

CUHK Maps



A : Y.C. Liang Hall, CUHK 香港中文大學 潤昌堂



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Information for Visitors

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<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/university/visitors.html>