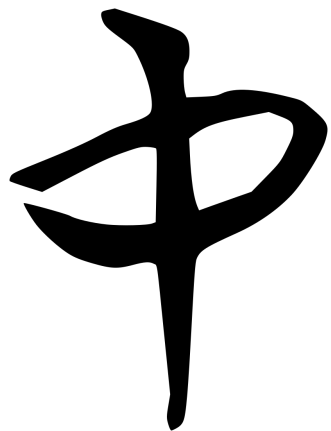


Chinese Nominal Phrases (Mandarin, Cantonese)



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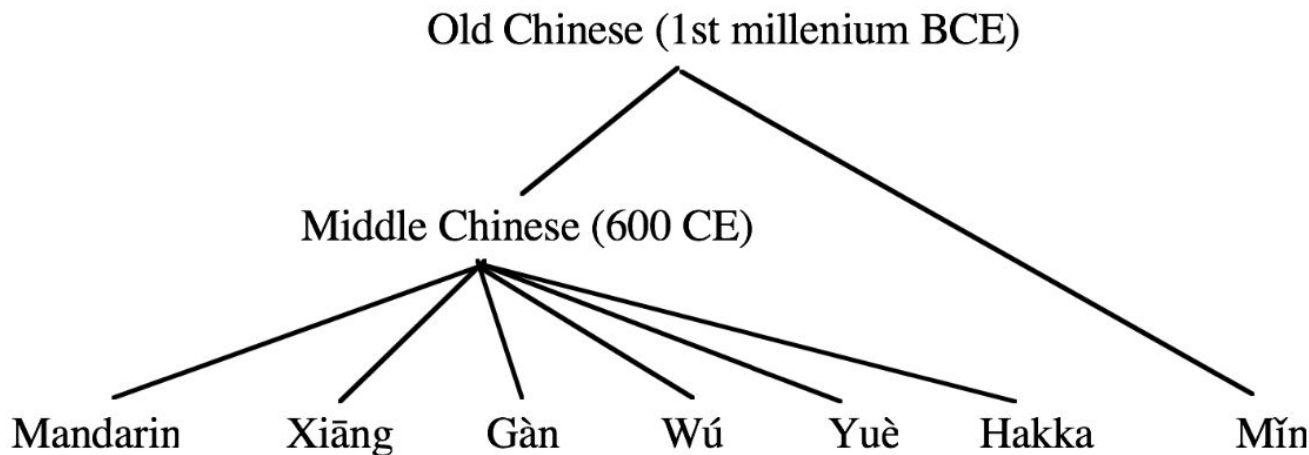


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Outline

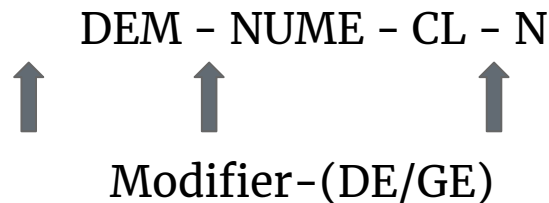
- The talk will focus on **Chinese nominal structure/NPs**
- Chinese: **Mandarin, Cantonese**
- **Problems** with ZHONG (HPSG Chinese Grammar) in parsing some **Mandarin nominal phrases**
- **Problems** if ZHONG would need to be adopted for **Cantonese**
- **Not exhaustive**

Chinese (Handel 2010)



- Yesterday: ZHONG as a **metagrammar** (for different Chinese languages); ZHONG as **Mandarin grammar** only
- Mandarin and Cantonese: similarities and differences in the nominal domain?

Mandarin and Cantonese (shared)



- (unmodified) inventory: [N], [Cl-N], [Nume-Cl-N], [Dem-Cl-N]
- Depending on the shape of the noun/Chinese variant, modification on the left might not be possible: *[modifier-Nume-Cl-N]
- No **singular/plural marking** on N; No **definite article**
- Multiple interpretations of the nominal form (in terms of singular/plural and definite/indefinite), e.g., 狗 (gǒu) 'dog'

Some problematic phrases for ZHONG (1)

Example phrases that shouldn't parse but do:

- *三些苹果 (sān xiē píngguǒ) [three-**Cl_{PL}**-apple] 'three apples'
- ✓ 三个苹果 (Sān gè píngguǒ) [three-**Cl_{SG}**-apple] 'three apples'
- ✓ 一些苹果 (sān xiē píngguǒ) [**one**-**Cl_{PL}**-apple] 'a few apples'
- 些 encodes plurality but doesn't allow individuation (doesn't provide units for counting). It only goes with 一 'one', which is more like an indefinite article (or turning into one).
- There are classifiers which indicate plural and can be counted (e.g., 群 (qún) 'group').

Some problematic phrases for ZHONG (2)

Example phrases that shouldn't parse but do:

- * 三 个 学生 们 (sān gè xuéshēng men) [three-**Cl_{SG}**-student.**PL maker**]
- The use of 们 is highly constrained plural 'marker' (humanness, incompatibility with simultaneous counting, definiteness, non-genericity, modal overtones) (Iljic 2010).

Some problematic phrases for ZHONG (3)

Example phrases that should parse but don't:

- 這狗 (zhè gǒu) [this-dog] (no classifier)
- 一 **大** 箱 书 (yī dà xiāng shū) [one-**big**-box-book] (container classifiers being modified by a very limited set of adjectives).
- [Cl-N] phrases (more colloquial).

A: What did you buy today?
B: I bought-perf [Cl-apple].

A: 你今天買了什麼？
B: 我買了個蘋果。

Cantonese

[Modifier-Cl-N]

- The bare modifier can be of various types (Cheung 1989, Sio 2006)
- It always definite (Sio 2006)
- Not grammatical in Mandarin
- e.g., 紅色本書 (hung4 sik1 bun2 syu1) [**red**-Cl_{SG}-book] ‘the red book’.
- [Cl-N] in Cantonese can be definite and indefinite (while only indefinite in Mandarin)
- [red-Cl_{SG}-book] → **definite**; [Cl_{SG}-red-book] → **definite/indefinite**

Cantonese

1



2



	[Cl-N]	[modifier-Cl-N]	[Cl-modifier-N]
Mandarin	indefinite	not possible	indefinite
Cantonese	definite/indefinite	only definite	definite/indefinite

In Cantonese, [Cl-N] phrases can appear in the subject position, but not in Mandarin. In general, only definite NPs can appear in the subject position in Chinese (Chao 1968, Li & Thompson 1981, Lee 1986, Tsai 1994, Li 1998)

Cantonese

- Two kinds of classifiers: **definite** and **indefinite** (Sio 2006)
- Only a definite classifier would allow a bare modifier (of various types) appearing to its left (Sio 2006).
- What do you gain? (i) [C-N] in Cantonese can be definite or indefinite; (ii)[modifier-Cl-N] is always definite (modifiers: relative clauses, possessors, locative phrases, etc.).

Evidence from other Chinese variants

- In both Hailu Hakka and Taiwanese Southern Min, [Cl-N] phrases cannot be interpreted as definite, and confirming, [bare modifier-Cl-N] phrases are not possible in the two languages (Sio 2006).
- In Zhongshan Min (Northeastern Min), there are two forms of one specific classifier (not in general), a definite form and an indefinite form; in [Modifier-Cl-N] phrases, this specific classifier has to be in its definite form (Sio 2020).

Zhongshan Min (definite/indefinite classifier)

(1) wa¹³ k^ho⁵⁵ mɛ:¹³ nɛi:¹¹ p^həŋ³¹ gwɔ:¹³

1SG go buy CL apple

‘I go buy **some apples**.’

(2) a⁵⁵ p^həŋ³¹ gwɔ:¹³ hɔ⁵⁵ hɔ¹³ mi³¹

CL apple very good taste

‘**The apples** are very tasty.’

Zhongshan Min, [Modifier-Cl-N]



hɔŋ³³-sək³¹ a⁵⁵ tɔɪ³¹ k^hɔ:⁵⁵-aŋ¹³ tɔɪ¹¹ a:¹¹
red-colour CL_{def} bag go-PERF where SFP
'Where are the red bags?'

Variations

- Mandarin only has indefinite classifiers.
- Prediction: for any nominal phrase containing a classifier it has to contain a demonstrative to be definite.
- But: bare nouns are definite in Mandarin; [Nume-Cl-N] phrases have mixed ‘reviews’ regarding definiteness in the literature, it can surely be indefinite, but can it be definite?
- Definiteness encoding is an important issue to solve. Many syntactic position are sensitive to it (e.g., subject, topic)

Possessive construction in Cantonese

- [Possessor-Cl-N] (only in Cantonese)
- [Possessor-RN] (relational noun) (only singular) (e.g., 我細佬 ngo5 sai3lou2 [I-brother] ‘my brother’)
- Relational noun (+human): kinship terms and others (e.g., teacher, lawyer, hairdresser)
- Why is it only singular?
- In addition to definiteness, classifiers have also been claimed to be related to number.

Conclusion

- Some observations on what kind of things can be fixed in Zhong regarding Mandarin data.
- Some observations on Cantonese data related to definiteness. There is a cluster of structures which can be accounted for if we assume there are 2 kinds of classifiers: definite and indefinite (it would also capture to an extent other Chinese variants).