Classifier Systems in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese

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Problems & Proposal: With respect to Number realization, languages are often grouped into two types: plural marker languages (e.g., English) and classifier languages (e.g., Mandarin, Japanese). As such, it often appears to be assumed implicitly or explicitly, without substantial comparative scrutiny (e.g., Huang & Ochi 2014), that classifiers in the latter languages largely share morpho-syntactic and/or semantic properties (e.g., Borer 2005, Chierchia 1998).

In contrast, this paper provides a comparative study of two well-known languages that employ generalized (counting) classifier systems: Mandarin (1a) and Japanese (1b).

(1) a. *san ge xuesheng* (Mandarin)
3 CL student
'three students'

b. *san nin no gakusei* (Japanese)
3 CL of student
'three students'

Based on contrasts in the behaviour of bare nouns and numeral classifier phrases, I show that counting classifiers in Mandarin specify individualization, while ones in Japanese are (part of) nominal modifiers.

Mass-Count distinction: Contrary to somewhat widely held view (Borer 2005, a.o.), I argue that bare nouns in both Mandarin and Japanese have a grammaticized mass-count expressed syntactically (Cheng & Sybesma 1999 for Mandarin; Sudo 2015 for Japanese). I claim that the contrast between these two languages is related to how the mass-count distinction is encoded morphosyntactically. In Mandarin, classifiers denote countability (or mass) of a noun (Cheng & Sybesma 1999). (Note that this does not mean classifiers atomize.) On the other hand, a noun itself carries a count-mass property in Japanese (whether lexically encoded, or specified at or below a nominalizing head). This claim is supported by the fact that bare nouns in Japanese (but not in Mandarin) show largely overlapped distributions with quantified nouns as in (1b); whether a noun is modified by a numeral classifier, nominal phrases are neutral in specificity/definiteness, and number.

On General Number: I demonstrate another difference between Mandarin and Japanese; General Number (Corbett 2000). Although bare nouns in both languages can describe a plural entity, only Mandarin commonly employs general number (Rullmann & You 2003), whereas those in Japanese are morphologically neutral (as in *fish/sheep/you* in English). I show that the criteria for general numbers (in Chinese) listed in Rullmann & You are not fully applicable in Japanese. I consider this contrast in the interpretations of bare nouns to be further supporting evidence for the differences in the function of classifiers in these languages: In Mandarin, bare nouns denote general number, i.e., semantically neutral in number, and hence number should be specified by a numeral classifier (if a noun is not mass); in Japanese, on the other hand, bare nouns are full-fledged, and a numeral classifier is just to modify them.

DP Structure: I further illustrate the differing structural properties of nominal domain in Mandarin and Japanese. Following Zhang (2011), I demonstrate that the DP internal relative scope relations indicate the constituency of a counting ('individuating' for Zhang) classifier and a noun in Mandarin (excluding a numeral), as in (2a). In Japanese, on the other hand, it is shown that a numeral and a classifier form a constituent excluding a noun, as in (2b) (assuming that 'of' is inserted at PF; Watanabe 2008).

(2)a. [3 [CL student]] (= 1a, Mandarin) **b.** [[3 CL] student] (= 1b, Japanese)

Extensions: I lastly explore the application of the proposed typological analysis to other classifier languages (e.g., Korean, Cantonese, Southeast Asian languages). I show that classifiers in East and Southeast Asian languages can be (roughly) classified into two groups (Mandarin-type, Japanese-type) with respect to functions of (numeral) classifiers and nominal structures.

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