

On the syntax of classifier reduplication in Cantonese and Mandarin
Chak-Lam Colum Yip
University of Washington
columyip@uw.edu

This paper investigates the syntactic phenomenon of classifier reduplication in Cantonese and Mandarin from a formal perspective. In Chinese, it is possible to create a quantifying expression that carries a distributive reading, simply by reduplicating a classifier, as shown in (1). However, it is noted by Yang (2004) that in the case of Mandarin, classifier reduplication cannot only appear prenominally as in (3). This restriction, however, does not exist in Cantonese (see 4).

Cheng (to appear) argues that reduplicated classifiers in both languages are adverbials when they appear between the “subject”¹ and the predicate, as in (5). She also claims that the reduplicated classifiers are analogous to the reduplicated nouns in (6) that act as adverbials. As for the difference shown in (3) and (4), Cheng argues that this could be attributed to the syntactic differences between classifiers in Mandarin and Cantonese. Classifiers in Cantonese are individuators that start out in IND(ividuation) head and move to CL(assifier) via head movement. Mandarin classifiers, however, do not start out as individuators. As such, they cannot appear prenominally.

In this paper, I argue that reduplicated classifiers are not adverbials. First, most classifiers (though not all) can be reduplicated and it is unlikely that our mental grammar creates adverbials on the spot by reduplicating them. Second, it is clear that the reduplicated classifiers in (7) cannot be an adverbial, as it appears between the topic and the subject. Furthermore, I argue that the core difference between classifier reduplication in Cantonese and Mandarin stems from the fact that classifier reduplication is only licensed in Mandarin when there is a topic to the left of it, a condition that seems to have already existed since archaic Chinese. The nonexistence of such a condition in Cantonese is attributed to the special featural makeup of CLs in Cantonese that also allows [CL-N] sequences to appear as nominal arguments.

Examples:

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| (1) | 這些花，朵朵都很漂亮。 | Mandarin | |
| (2) | 呢啲花，朵朵都好靚。 | Cantonese | |
| (3) | ??朵朵花都很漂亮。 | Mandarin | |
| (4) | 朵朵花都好靚。 | Cantonese | |
| (5) | 學生個個都很用功。 | Mandarin | (from Cheng, to appear) |
| (6) | 他們天天(都)吃麵包。 | Mandarin | (from Cheng, to appear) |
| (7) | 金庸寫的書，本本我都看過。 | Mandarin | |

References:

- Yang, Kai Rong (2004). Liang-ci congdie jushi yu “mei” jushi zai yuyi gongneng ji jufa shang de xiangtong. (The similarity between the meaning and structural difference between sentences with classifier reduplication and mei). *Contemporary Research in Modern Chinese* 2004:1-8
- Cheng, Lisa L.-S. In preparation. On Every-type of quantificational expression in Chinese. Unpublished manuscript.

¹ In my analysis, it is treated as a topic.