

## **A Semantic Study of Container Classifiers in Cantonese**

**Patrick Chun Kau Chu** (patrickhk@cuhk.edu.hk), Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

**Fat Wong Stella** (w\_f\_stella@hotmail.com), Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Previous studies in Cantonese classifiers mainly focused on general noun phrases with little ambiguity, which overlook the ambiguous boundaries for the choice of mensural and sortal classifiers. Our study mainly focuses on the choice of container classifiers. When counting these items, it is obligatory for language users to use classifiers. The classifiers used cannot be easily categorized binarily by the previous framework into sortal or mensural. By slicing and analyzing the patterns of the choices of classifiers, we hope to find a structure/ hierarchy in the classifier-noun phrase mapping in Cantonese container classifiers.

Based on our previous study on the semantics of the container classifiers with adult Cantonese speakers, we proposed a hierarchy to explain the categorization and the co-occurrence conditions of container classifiers in Cantonese. The proposed hierarchy is based on matching the shape, material, flexibility and size features of the items and the container classifiers in Cantonese. Shapes and dimensions are perceived first for the decision on the choice of classifiers. After this processing, if the item could not be classified into a particular category and assigned a suitable classifier, it needs to be processed through the next hierarchy. There is a mapping for the features of each classifier and the packaging material of the item. If the features of the classifier and the item match with each other, that particular classifier will be chosen by the speaker and used with that particular item. If a suitable mapping cannot be found, the process continues down the hierarchy. If a one-to-one mapping could not be established after processing through the last level - size (i.e. there are still more than one classifier suitable for the item), then each individual may have a different choice of classifiers.

Correspondence: Patrick Chun Kau Chu, patrickhk@cuhk.edu.hk, G14, Fung King Hey Building, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong