

# Positions of Mandarin classifiers in and out of compounds: implications for Distinctness, selection, and projection

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## 1. Introduction

Mandarin classifiers can occur in *pre-nominal positions* (1) and in *noun-classifier (N-CL) compounds* (2):

- (1) yi **di** shui (2) yi **ge** shui-**di**  
 one CL.DROP water one CL.GEN water-CL.DROP  
 'one drop of water' 'one waterdrop'

**Main claim:** The distribution and selectional properties of classifiers give evidence for *ClassifierP recursion*, constrained by *Distinctness* (Richards 2010)

- New explanation for why adjacent heads of functional sequences (Rizzi 1997) often not simultaneously visible.

## 2. Noun-classifier compounds

While restricted with individual classifiers (3a) and measure words, N-CL compounds *productive with most classifier types*: individuating (b), collective (c), kind (d), etc.

- (3) a. hua-**duo** b. mu-**pian** c. gou-**qun** d. shu-**zhong**  
 flower-C.HEAD wood-C.SLICE dog-CL.GROUP tree-CL.TYPE

Zhang (2013): N-CL compounds and CI N sequences are *equivalent in delimitability readings* related to the CI.

- (4) a. \*da shui b. da shui-**di** c. ...da **di** shui  
 big water big water-CL.DROP big CL.DROP water

- Same s-selection relations between CI + N, Adj + CI.

**Claim:** Compounds are generated by N movement to a regular Classifier head (cf. Zhang's DelP in compounds)

## 3. CIP recursion in compounds

Like simplex Ns, N-CI compounds cannot directly combine with a numeral; they are preceded by a separate classifier:

- *Expletive* generic classifier *ge* or reduplicant of the compound-internal classifier:  
 (5) san \*(**ge/di**) shui-**di**  
 three CL.GEN/CL.DROP water-CL.DROP  
 'three waterdrops'
- Classifier of any semantic class (collective, kind, etc.)  
 (6) san \*(**chuan/zhong/tong/...**) shui-**di**  
 three CL.ROW/CL.KIND/CL.BUCKET water-CL.DROP  
 'three rows/kinds/buckets of waterdrops.'

**Claim:** UnitP, which hosts numbers, is licensed by movement of a CI head to Unit.

- N-CL compounds license a *recursive CIP* structure.

**Puzzle:** Sequences of pre-nominal classifiers are not grammatical in Mandarin, for all classifier types.

- (7) \*san (**chuan/zhong/tong**) **di** shui  
 three CL.ROW/CL.KIND/CL.BUCKET CL.DROP water  
*intended:* 'three rows/kinds/buckets of waterdrops'

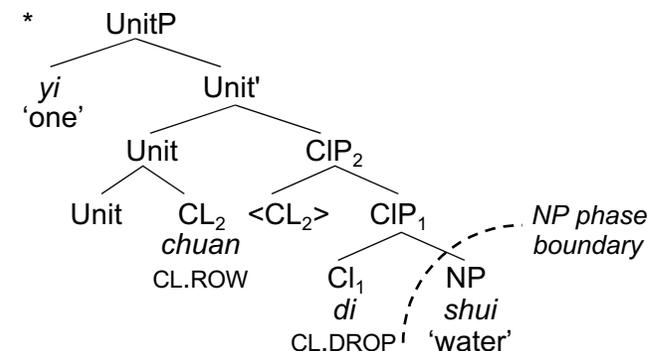
- Restriction not due to *semantic incompatibility*, given grammatical CI co-occurrence with N-CL compounds (6)
- What is the formal restriction on CIP recursion here?

**Proposal:** Availability of CIP recursion is predicted by the *Distinctness* condition (Richards 2010) and the head-movement analysis of N-CL compounds.

## 4. Distinctness and CIP recursion

**Distinctness:** Sufficiently similar objects in the same spell-out domain cannot be linearized. (Richards 2010)

- Violated by CI CI N sequences: two CI heads in same spell-out domain.



- Obviated by N-to-CI head movement in compounds: N phase extends (den Dikken 2007) to the lower CIP.

