Analysis on Double Plurals in Cantonese-English Mixing Varieties in HK

DGfS 2026 Workshop 5: Tracing Mismatches

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25th–27th February 2026



Leibniz-Zentrum
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Topic I

- (Bilingual) speakers employing two morphemes for expressing plurality, double plurality, is not a rare phenomenon and has been attested in different languages and language pairs across typologies (Kramer, 2016; Acquaviva, 2008; Alexiadou, 2024; Amuzu, 2009)

(1) i de învăța cu *final-s*-uri-le.
have.2SG to learn with final-PL-PL.FEM-DET.FEM.PL
'You have to study with the finals (coming up)' [Romanian-*English*] (Bancu, 2013) (from Alexiadou (2024, 6))

(2) Nye *younger brother-s* wó kata
1SG younger brother-PL PL all
'All my younger brothers' [Ewe-*English*] (Amuzu, 2009) (from Alexiadou (2024, 2))

Topic II

- Many instances in the Cantonese-English bilingual variety: using both the plural markers from both languages
- Product of language contact over 150 years due to historical reasons
- The double plurals in Cantonese-English should not be simply ignored or disregarded as careless mistakes or grammatical errors, but rather, should be offered a more detailed analysis by addressing the following questions:
  - Is this form(double)-meaning(single) mismatch?
  - What is the role of each plural marker?
  - What is the morphosyntactic analysis of this? (along the line discussed in Acquaviva (2008); Alexiadou (2024); Kramer (2016))
  - What is the possible motivation for this double realisation?

Outline

1 Background information
- Plurality in Cantonese
- Theoretical Framework
- Lexical Plurals and Double Plurality

2 Research Question

3 Double Plurals in Cantonese-English

4 Morphosyntactic Analysis

5 Motivation

6 References

7 Appendix
- Alternative analysis

Expressing plurality in Cantonese

- Cantonese does not have inflectional morphology
- There are several ways to express plurality in Cantonese:
  1. With the plural classifier (CL) *di*
  2. With the quantifier e.g. *gei* 'few'
  3. With the counting number and singular CL

Plurality in Cantonese: Plural CL

- The plural CL *di* (L. L.-S. Cheng, 2012): its property of having similar functions of a singular CL with the function of licensing the plural interpretation
- *di* can be bare (3a) or take the numeral *one* only (3b)

(3) a.

我	哋	買	咗	啲	書	啦
ngo^{23}	*dei*^{22}	*maai*^{23}	*zo*^{35}	*di*^{55}	*syu*^{55}	*laa*^{55}
1.	PL	buy	PFV	CL.PL	book	SFP

'We bought the books' (L. L.-S. Cheng, 2012)

b.

嗰	度	有	一	啲	書
go^{35}	*dou*^{22}	*yau*^{23}	*jat*^{55}	*di*^{55}	*syu*^{55}
DEM:that	LOC	EXIST	one	CL.PL	book

'There are some books'

Plurality in Cantonese: Quantifier

- Adverbials like quantifiers: *hou do*‘a lot’ (4a), *gei* ‘few’ (4b)
- Depending on which quantifier, the singular CL is optional (4a) or obligatory (4b)

(4) a.

我	買	咗	好	多	（本）	書
ngo^{23}	*maai*^{23}	*zo*^{35}	*hou*^{35}	*do*^{55}	(*bun*^{35})	*syu*^{55}
1.	buy	PFV	very	many	(CL)	book

‘I bought a lot of books’

b.

我	買	咗	幾	本	書
ngo^{23}	*maai*^{23}	*zo*^{35}	*gei*^{35}	*bun*^{35}	*syu*^{55}
1.	buy	PFV	few	CL	book

‘I bought a few books’

Plurality in Cantonese: Count with number

- Number for the exact amount of the entity
- Obligatory with the singular CL (5)

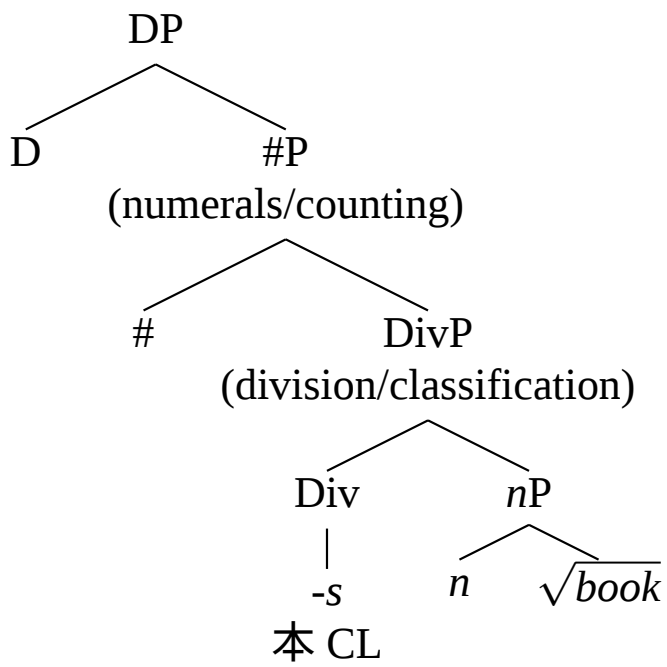
(5)

我	買	咗	三	*（本）	書
ngo^{23}	*maai*^{23}	*zo*^{35}	*saam*^{55}	*(*bun*^{35})	*syu*^{55}
1.	buy	PFV	three	*(CL)	book

‘I bought three books’

Theoretical Framework

- Distributed Morphology: a decompositional framework – a categoriser makes a $\sqrt{Root}$ to a word
- Based on the structure proposed in Borer (2005):
- Share function: the classifier (CL) in classifier languages (i.e. Cantonese) & the plural marker in inflectional languages (i.e. English)
  - Singling out the units from the mass before counting
  - Occupying the same syntactic head: the Div(ider)P



Lexical plurals

- Another kind of plural, the lexical plurals (Acquaviva, 2008)
- Idiosyncratic, unproductive, syntactically irregular etc. (see more in Alexiadou (2021a)) (Contrast to the inflectional plural (e.g. *-s* in English))
- Not produce a meaning of multiple units of the item, and sometimes have a form-meaning mismatches (e.g. *funds*, *waters*) (Acquaviva, 2008)

Double realisation of lexical plural and grammatical plural

- Using both plural markers if available in some languages

(6) bugel bugel-e bugel-e-ou
child child-PL child-PL-PL
'child children children' [Breton] (Acquaviva, 2008)

(7) k'al k'al-at k'al-at-otʃtʃ
word word-PL word-PL-PL
'word words words' [Amharic] (Kramer, 2016)

- The split realisation between the lexical plural and the grammatical plural

Nature of Plural and Split Plurality I

- Acquaviva (2008) has suggested: the multifacetedness of plurality & the function/ meaning of each layer of plurality:
  1. The collectiveness: the mass reading which "connect all the parts of a whole with each other and with nothing else" through "a unifying relation holding between members of collective concepts" (101) e.g. *orchestra*
     - creating the sense of "cohesiveness"
     - "this whole is more than the sum of its constituent parts: it is not-additive" (101)
     - Eventually allows for a further pluralisation (Acquaviva, 2008, 106)
  2. The collection of singularities: cumulative reading - dividing individuals and aggregating of discrete individuals
- One illustrative example is *people* vs. *persons* or *Wörter* and *Worte* in German

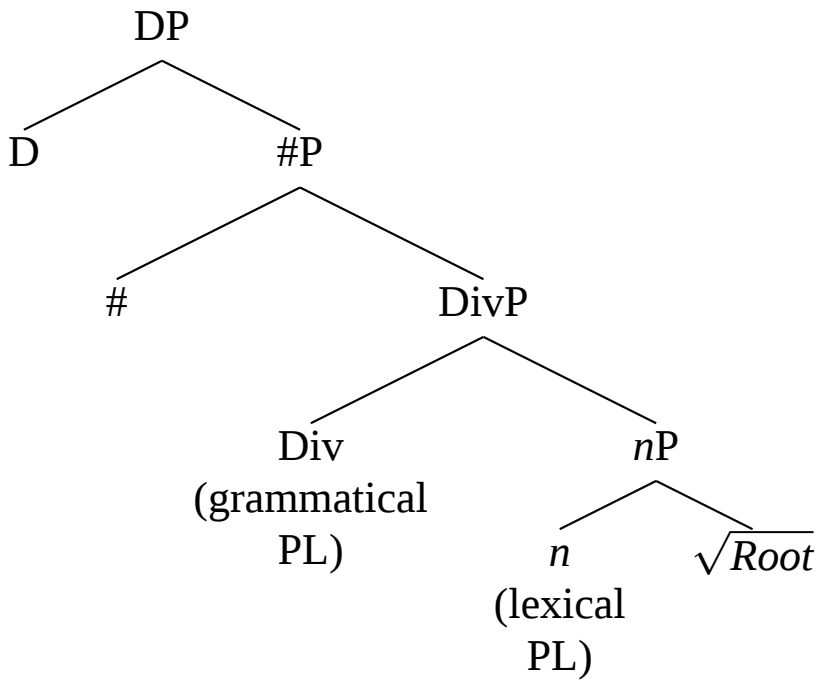
Nature of Plural and Split Plurality II

- The two meanings correlate with the two types of plurals:

Plural	**Meaning**	**Syntactic feature**
Lexical plural	collectiveness/ whole	derivational, word-making
Grammatical plural	cumulativeness	inflectional

Analysis of the split plurality I

- Under Borer (2005)'s structure, inflectional plural at Div head
- For different semantic contributions: the lexical plural does not occupy the same position → two exponents crashed?
- Lexical plural: nature as a word-maker, located in the *n*-categoriser



Analysis of the split plurality II

- Extra evidence for this claim: in some languages (e.g. Italian), interaction between lexical plural and grammatical gender (the proposed occupant of the categoriser)

(8) a. membro
member-MASC
'member' (singular)

b. membri
member-MASC.PL
'members'

c. membra
member-FEM.PL
'limbs'

Double plurals in language mixing

- Attested in language mixing across different typologies of languages and different language families

(1) i de învăța cu *final-s*-uri-le.
have.2SG to learn with final-PL-PL.FEM-DET.FEM.PL
'You have to study with the finals (coming up)' [Romanian-*English*] (Bancu, 2013) (from Alexiadou (2024, 6))

(2) Nye *younger brother-s* wó kata
1SG younger brother-PL PL all
'All my younger brothers' [Ewe-*English*] (Amuzu, 2009) (from Alexiadou (2024, 2))

- Similar analysis applied to double plural examples: e.g. in (2), the English marker for creating a "collective" meaning and the Ewe marker for pluralisation

Research Question

- Double plurals in the previous literature and corpus in the Cantonese-English variety
- No analysis provided for another plurality type in Cantonese: the CL
- The current study:
  - Is this form(double)-meaning(single) mismatch?
  - What is the role of each plural marker?
  - What is the morphosyntactic analysis of this? (along the line discussed in Acquaviva (2008); Alexiadou (2024); Kramer (2016))
  - What is the possible motivation for this double realisation?

Double plurals in the Cantonese-English variety

- The examples are found in two sources:
  1. the previous literature reporting code-switching (spontaneous spoken data)
  2. the corpus Cantonese Web Corpus (CantoneseWaC) (Baroni et al., 2009) on Sketch Engine, data from written Cantonese texts on the Internet
- Double plural are quite productive in all three expressions of Cantonese plurality
  1. Plural CL *di*
  2. Quantifier with or without singular CL
  3. Counting with a number and singular CL

Cantonese plural CL + English plural suffix

(9)

除咗	呢	啲	*technical*	嘅	*problem-s*	之外
ceoi^{21}*zo*^{35}	*ni*^{55}	*di*^{55}	technical	*ge*^{33}	problem-s	*zi*^{55}*ngoi*^{22}
apart from	DEM:this	CL.PL	technical	GE	problem-PL	besides

'Apart from these technical problems' (Pennington et al., 1996) (from Chan (1999, 202))

(10)

啲	*bar-s*	有	開	但係	無	做	*show*
di^{55}	bar-s	*jau*^{23}	*hoi*^{55}	*daan*^{22}*hai*^{22}	*mou*^{21}	*zou*^{22}	show
CL.PL	bar-PL	EXIST	open	but	NEG	do	show

'The bars are open but they don't have shows' (Baroni et al., 2009)

(11)

如果	啲	*sponsor*	*speaker-s*	都	去
jyu^{21}*gwo*^{35}	*di*^{55}	sponsor	speaker-s	*dou*^{55}	*heoi*^{33}
If	CL.PL	sponsor	speaker-PL	also	go

'If the sponsor speakers also go' (Leung, 1987) (from Chan (1999, 203))

Cantonese quantifier & CL + English plural suffix

(12)

有	幾	個	*question-s*	希望	可	幫忙	解答
jau^{23}	*gei*^{35}	*go*^{33}	question-s	*hei*^{55}*mong*^{22}	*ho*^{35}	*bong*^{55}*mong*^{21}	*gaai*^{35}*daap*^{33}
EXIST	few	CL	question-PL	hope	can	help	answer

'There are a few questions I hope you can help to answer' (Baroni et al., 2009)

(13)

化	了	淡	妝	來	港	的	蔡依林	看	到
faa^{33}	*liu*^{23}	*taam*^{23}	*zong*^{55}	*loi*21	*gong*^{35}	*dik*^{55}	*coi*^{33}*ji*^{55}*lam*^{21}	*hon*^{33}	*dou*^{33}
put	PFV	light	makeup	come	Hong Kong	DIK	Jolin Choi	see	DOU

只	得	幾	個	*fan-s*	接	機	時
zi^{35}	*dak*^{55}	*gei*^{35}	*go*^{33}	fans-s	*zip*^{33}	*gei*^{55}	*si*^{21}
only	DAK	few	CL	fan-PL	pick up	plane	time

'When Jolin Choi, who came to Hong Kong with a light makeup on, saw only a few fans came to pick her up' (Baroni et al., 2009)

Cantonese quantifier & CL + English plural suffix

- Although much rarer, the double plural construction is also attested with Cantonese nouns

(14)

聽	說	有	幾	位	思	哲	兄-*s*,	*i*'	*m*
teng^{55}	*syut*^{33}	*jau*^{23}	*gei*^{35}	*wai*^{35}	*si*^{55}	*zit*^{33}	*hing*^{55}-s,	I'	m
hear	say	EXIST	few	CL	thinking	philosophy	brother-PL,	1.SG'	COP

with	*him*	*on*	*certain*	*article-s*
with	him	on	certain	article-s
with	3.SG.ACC	PREP	certain	article-PL

'I have heard there are a few philosophical brothers, I'm with him on certain articles' [Cantonese-*English*] (Baroni et al., 2009)

Cantonese numeral & CL + English plural suffix

(15)

但係	三	間	*college-s*	又	有	*short*	*course-s*	*for*
daan^{22}*hai*^{22}	*saam*^{55}	*gaan*^{55}	college-s	*jau*^{22}	*jau*^{23}	short	course-s	for
but	three	CL	college-PL	also	have	short	course-PL	for

language teacher-s
language teacher-s
language teacher-PL

'But three colleagues also offer short courses for language teachers' (Leung, 1988)
(from Chan (1999, 198))

(16)

瞓覺	前	又	諗	吓	三	個	大	*project-s*
fan^{33}*gaau*^{33}	*cin*^{21}	*jau*^{22}	*nam*^{35}	*haa*^{23}	*saam*^{55}	*go*^{33}	*daai*^{22}	project-s
sleep	before	again	think	ASP	three	CL	big	project-PL

'(I) thought about the three big projects again before I slept' (Baroni et al., 2009)

Analysis

- The analysis in Alexiadou (2024) on double plurals in other language pairs: further extended to CL-type of plurality & the cases found in the Cantonese-English variety
- Multifaceted plurality (Acquaviva, 2008): (i) collection of singularities (at Div) and (ii) lexical meanings: collectives (at *n*)
- A form-meaning disambiguation strategy of bilingual speakers:
  - Two different functions
  - Occupying different syntactic positions

Cases of Plural CL with plural suffix

(11)

如果	啲	*sponsor*
jyu^{21} *gwo*^{35}	*di*^{55}	sponsor
If	CL.PL	sponsor
speaker-s	都	去
speaker-s	*dou*^{55}	*heoi*^{33}
speaker-PL	also	go

'If the sponsor speakers also go'

(12)

有	幾	/ 三	個
jau^{23}	*gei*^{35}	/ *saam*^{55}	*go*^{33}
EXIST	few	/ three	CL
question-s	…		
question-s	…		
question-PL	…		

'There are a few/three questions...'
(adapted from Baroni et al. (2009))

- The reading of *speakers*: group/ mass reading – a collective one (cluster), instead of referring to more than one *speaker*
- The 'additive' sense of pluralising: the plural CL *di* of Cantonese, i.e. the reading of *more than one*
- The same applied to the other plural forms of Cantonese:
  - English *-s* for collective meaning of a whole group
  - The single CL divides the mass
  - The quantifier or the number "multiplies" the entities and creates the plural meaning

Extra evidence: Distributivity I

- Another evidence: the distributive or cumulative reading of singular or double plural

(17) a.

啲	fan-s	揮	旗
di^{55}	fan-s	*fai*^{55}	*kei*^{21}
CL.PL	fan-PL	wave	flag

'The fans wave the flag'

b.

fan-s	揮	旗
fan-s	*fai*^{55}	*kei*^{21}
fan-PL	wave	flag

'Fans wave the flag'

- Among the two examples:
  - only (17a) has both the distributive (EACH fan waves a flag) and cumulative reading (the fans TOGETHER waves one flag)
  - but (17b) can only have the cumulative reading

Extra evidence: Distributivity II

- Another distributive operator **classifier reduplication** (with reading of 'each' or 'every'): not compatible with a noun marked with English PL (Hsu & Lee, 2019; L. L.-S. Cheng, 2009; Lee, 2020; L. Cheng, 1995)

(18)

個-個	*waiter*-**s*	都	好似	行屍走肉	一樣
go^{33}-*go*^{33}	waiter-**s*	*dou*^{55}	*hou*^{35}*ci*^{23}	*hang*^{21}*si*^{55}*zau*^{35}*juk*^{22}	*jat*^{55}*joeng*^{22}
CL-CL	waiter-*PL	DOU	like	idiom: walking dead	same

'Every waiter is like a walking dead' (Baroni et al., 2009)

Extra evidence: Distributivity III

- Nouns marked with the English PL only: not compatible with distributive adjectives, unless with a quantifier

(19) a.

Fan-s	*(全部	都)	好	高
Fan-s	*(*cyun*^{21}*bou*^{22}	*dou*^{55})	*hou*^{35}	*gou*^{55}
fan-PL	all	DOU	very	tall

'All the fans are tall'

b.

啲	*Fan-s*	(全部	都)	好	高
di^{55}	Fan-s	(*cyun*^{21}*bou*^{22}	*dou*^{55})	*hou*^{35}	*gou*^{55}
CL.PL	fan-PL	all	DOU	very	tall

'All the fans are tall'

Extra Evidence: Kind Reading

- English bare PL has a kind reading e.g. *dogs bark = this kind of animal generally barks*
- Double plurals: no kind-reading available

(20) a.

college-s	通常	好	難	入
college-s	*tong*^{55}*soeng*^{21}	*hou*^{35}	*naan*^{21}	*jap*^{22}
college-PL	generally	very	hard	in

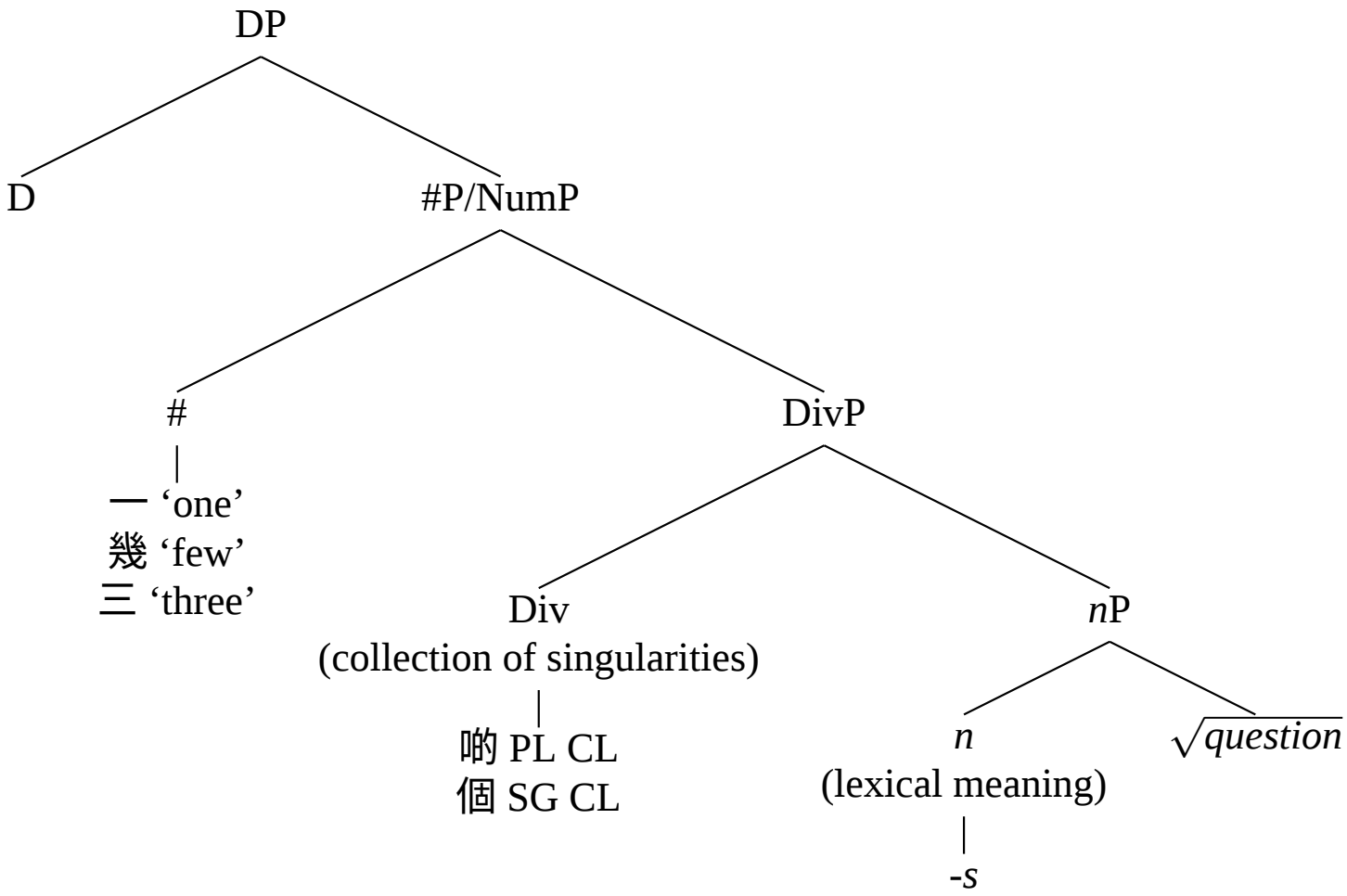
'Colleges are generally very hard to get into' (implies: compared to other types of educational institutes)

b.

一	啲	*college-s*	通常	好	難	入
jat^{55}	*di*^{55}	college-s	*tong*^{55}*soeng*^{21}	*hou*^{35}	*naan*^{21}	*jap*^{22}
one	CL.PL	college-PL	usually	very	hard	in

'Some colleges are usually very hard to get into' (implies: compared to other colleges)

Syntactic structure



Realising plurality in bilingual

- Three options available for Cantonese-English bilinguals to express plurality:
  1. the Cantonese monolingual way (one of the three ways listed above)
  2. with English plural suffix *-s*
  3. double with both Cantonese and English markers

(21) a. 我尋日睇咗三篇 *article*

b. 我尋日睇咗 three *article-s*

c.

我	尋日	睇	咗	三	篇	*article-s*
ngo^{23}	*cam*^{21}*jat*^{22}	*tai*^{35}	*zo*^{35}	*saam*^{55}	*pin*^{55}	article-s
1.	yesterday	see	PFV	three	CL	article-PL

'I read some articles yesterday' [Cantonese-*English*]

Overexplicitness for disambiguation I

- No **mismatch** but a **form-meaning mapping disambiguation strategy** of bilinguals:
  - Bilinguals value transparency: the one-to-one form and meaning mapping mechanism:
    - "assuming two semantic features C1, C2 may be realised either together by a single exponent En (fusion) or by two exponents E1, E2, then E1, E2 is more transparent than En." (Alexiadou, 2021b)
  - similar to the Maximize Exponence Principle (Guasti et al., 2023; Hein et al., To appear; Martin et al., 2023):
    1. Realize features in the building blocks of a complex unit by using one exponent for each feature
    2. Avoid zero (and thus fusion of functional nodes)

Overexplicitness for disambiguation II

- Dual layers of plurality (Acquaviva, 2008), the possible separated realisation of plurality for bilinguals
- Speakers in language contact situations (e.g. Creole or L2 acquisition) favour transparency (Don, 2017; Leufkens et al., 2015; Polinsky, 2018; Rodina & Westergaard, 2017)

Thank you very much!

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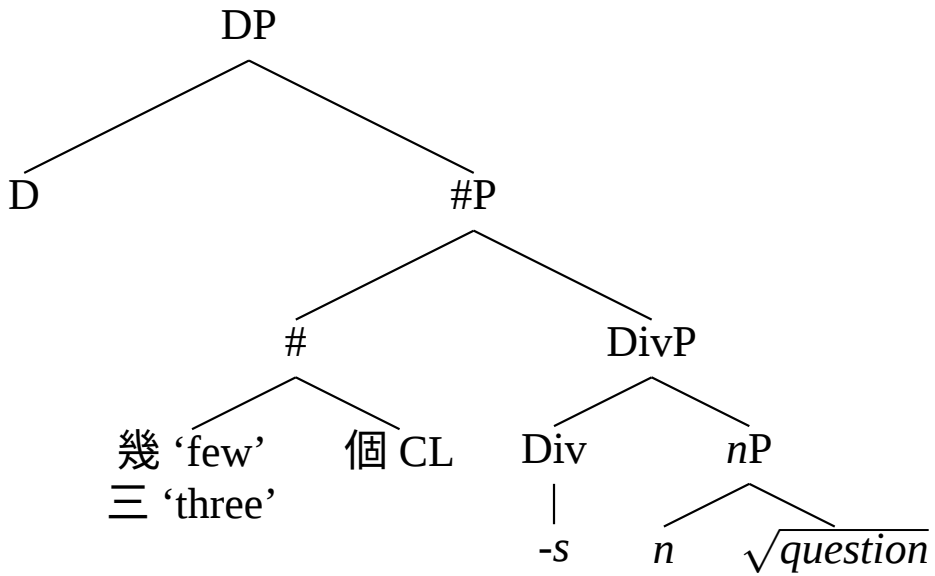
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Alternative analysis: agreement

- Alternative analysis: one plural within the double plural is for pure syntactic agreement only
  - The English suffix *-s* only for agreeing the plural marking of Cantonese, i.e. carrying no meaning
  - If it is reflecting the agreement, it should be across the bilingual variety and show up every time, but it is optional
  - The reading of double plurals favours the semantic contribution analysis in the current study: English *-s* has a semantic contribution, i.e. the group meaning; as well as the distributive vs. cumulative reading

Alternative analysis: movement



- The movement of one of the plurals into a higher node: the singular CL moves upward and conjoins the quantifiers or numbers in the # node, which leaves the Div head to the plural morphemes from English
- The plural suffix *-s* is not understood as a word-maker but a divider as the plural morpheme in monolingual English - it does not create a lexical meaning from the $\sqrt{Root}$ but simply singles out the unit from the mass
- Additionally, the counting function is conveyed by the combination of the singular CLs and quantifiers or numbers at the # node