Double Classifiers in Cantonese-Japanese: split realisation of definiteness & specificity

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Background

Background

- Negative attitude and connotation of language mixing: stigmatised as linguistic "incorrectness" and lack of proficiency in both languages (Yim & Clément, 2021) → newly formed groups in particular
- Despite the proven misconception: long studied and understood as a marker of mastery of two languages, among many other benefits: better attention control (Marian & Shook, 2012)

Group

- Since 2019, the political movements in HK have led many citizens to move to other countries, including Japan
- The newly found bilingual groups (mainly adults; 5–8 years of immigration): the dominant language remains Cantonese (YUE); daily language is Japanese (JP)
- The expectation of mixed use of languages: investigation of the double classifier (CL) structure in YUE–JP

Linguistic Background

Cantonese: no determiner system; using [CL-n] to express definiteness (Cheng & Sybesma, 1999; Jenks, 2018)

(1) 我 攞 咗 張 色紙
ngo^{23} *lo*^{35} *zo*^{35} *zoeng*^{11} *sik*^{55}*zi*^{35}
1. take PFV CL coloured paper
'I took the coloured paper' [YUE]

Japanese: no determiner system; using the positions of the CL to express definiteness (Downing, 1984)

(2) a. The individuating #-CL-GEN-N-K for specificity
二 枚 の 色紙 を 取っ-た
ni mai no irogami o tot-ta
two CL GEN coloured paper ACC take-PST
'(I) took two pieces of coloured paper'

b. Apposition N-#-CL-K for definiteness
色紙 二 枚 を 取っ-た
irogami ni mai o tot-ta
coloured paper two CL ACC take-PST
'(I) took two pieces of coloured paper'

c. Adverbial N-K-#-CL for indefiniteness
色紙 を 二 枚 取っ-た
irogami o ni mai tot-ta
coloured paper ACC two CL take-PST
'(I) took two pieces of coloured paper' [JP](Downing, 1984)

	JP individuating specificity #-CL-GEN-nP-K	**JP** appositional def nP-#-CL-K	**JP** adverbial indef nP-K-#-CL
YUE def CL-nP	possible	✗redundancy	✗semantic clash
YUE indef #-CL-nP	possible	✗semantic clash	✗redundancy

Research Questions

Whether doubling (using both JP and YUE) CL is possible, since the two CL structures have different meanings? That is, whether the split realisation of definiteness and specificity involving two CL structures is possible.

(3) Context: Your friend accompanied you to buy coloured papers, and you talked about the papers today:

a. 啲 三 枚 の 色紙 は…
di^{55} san mai no *sik*^{55}*zi*^{35}/irogami wa
CL.PL.YUE three CL.JP GEN coloured paper TOP
'Intended: The three coloured papers…' [JP sentence]

b. 啲 三 枚 の 色紙 呢…
di^{55} san mai no *sik*^{55}*zi*^{35}/irogami *ne*^{55}
CL.PL.YUE three CL.JP GEN coloured paper SFP
'Intended: The three coloured papers…' [YUE sentence]

Methodology

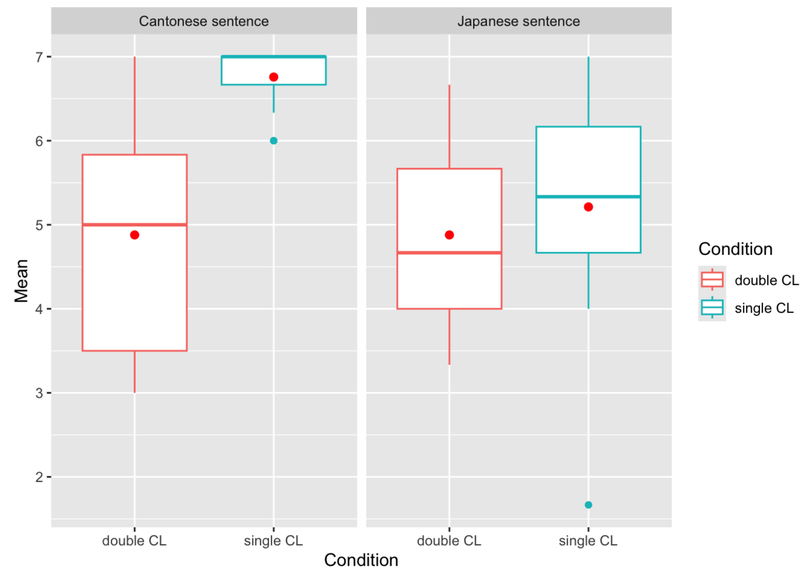
Acceptability Judgement Test (on a Likert Scale 1-7), based on the considerations:

- a relatively small new bilingual group
- dominant language remains YUE: hard to elicit production/naturalistic data
- no corpora available
- good for not only testing what is possible, but also what is impossible

Item	CL	Item	CL	Item	CL	Item	CL
coloured paper	枚	cat	匹	magazine	冊	scissors	丁
daisy	輪	robbery	件	car	台	materials	部
colored pencil	本	tempura	皿	song	曲	socks	足

Participants: 12 Cantonese speakers from HK living in JP

Results



	Monolingual: singular CL	Mixing: double CL
in YUE sentence	6.75	4.88
in JP sentence	5.21	4.88

→ bilinguals are prone to accept the doubling CL, although rated lower

Analysis: Split realisation of definiteness and specificity

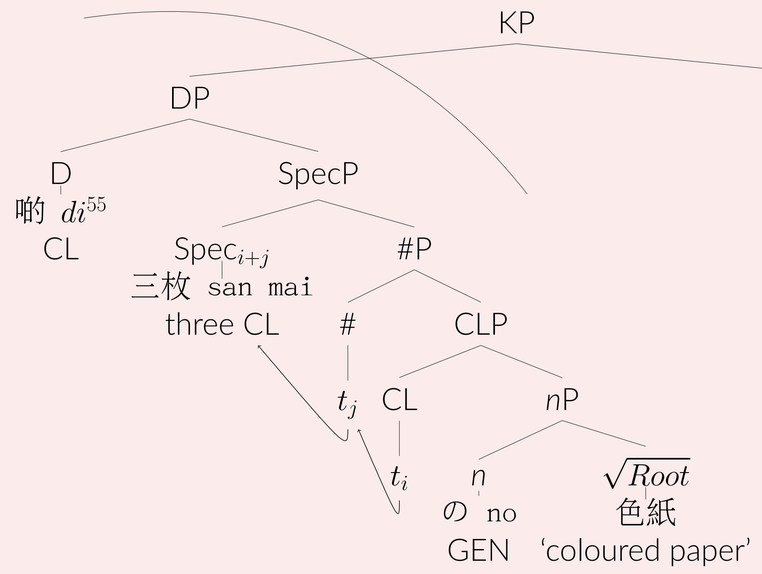
"Division of Labour":

YUE is responsible for definiteness & JP for specificity → Split realisation

- Doubling is not rare in language mixing: double complementisers, double plurals, double comparatives, double tense markers, etc. (Alexiadou, 2024)
- Instead of disregarding it as "mistakes", language mixing is rule-governed + systematic

The Generative Approach

[adapted structure from Caruso (2016) or Ihsane (2008)]



Transparency matters!

- Bilinguals have more materials available in their computational system/ inventory (Alexiadou & Lohndal, 2018)
- "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, 2021)
- **A form-meaning mapping disambiguation strategy of bilinguals**: the one-to-one form and meaning mapping mechanism
- Align with the *Maximize Exponence Principle* (Guasti et al., 2023; Hein et al., To appear; Martin et al., 2023)
  1. Realise 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)
- Common in language contact situations (e.g. Creole or L2 acquisition) favour transparency (Don, 2017; Leufkens et al., 2015)

Interpretation

- Mixing is not a random mistake/ mix-up but a strategy to achieve effective/ clear communication
- One Language Faculty: same functional spine and semantic primitives
- More resources to use to "fill" the functional spine

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