
Mandarin Chinese nominal complexes: unifying classifiers, modifiers and demonstratives

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The structure of Mandarin Chinese nominal complexes (CNCs) is subject to extensive research, with the main issues centering on the implications for right and left-branching analyses and for the NP/DP¹ debate (Cheng & Sybesma, 1999; Bošković & Hsieh, 2013; Her & Tsai, 2020). However, there has been little work on CNCs in the tradition of HPSG (Pollard & Sag, 1994). In this paper, we attempt to bridge this gap and argue that the distributional properties of modifiers and demonstratives with respect to nouns and classifiers motivate a head-functor approach (HFA) (Van Eynde, 2006, 2021), where [Num CL N] sequences are analyzed as left-branching NPs. The HFA allows us to unify the combinatorial properties of CLs, Mods and Dems (thus explaining their similarities in Mandarin Chinese), while also accounting for their differences by means of selectional constraints and a hierarchy of M(A)RK(ING) values. All in all, our analysis entails that CNCs are fundamentally different from nominal structures in languages with dedicated determiners, suggesting a two-way typology of languages which is parallel to the NP/DP parameter proposed in the minimalist tradition (Chierchia 1998; Bošković 2008, i.a.).

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¹Abbreviations used in the paper: N(P) = noun (phrase), DP = determiner phrase, Num = numeral, CL = classifier, Dem = demonstrative.