

## Toronto Cantonese heritage speakers' use of classifiers

Classifiers, morphemes that categorize nouns according to semantic category, are a robust grammatical feature of Cantonese. Classifiers specialize to noun classes and so have no English parallel (except occasional specialized contexts, e.g. “murder of crows”). They are governed by a range of complex factors. The complex system of classifiers contrasts sharply with English non-use of classifiers: our 2.2 hour sample has 35 distinct classifiers. These facts make them an ideal candidate for investigation of language contact phenomena. While acquisition and use of Cantonese classifiers in L1 and balanced bilingual contexts is documented through experimental studies (cf. Loke&Harrison 1986, Mak 1991), the study of classifier use in spontaneous speech is less developed, as is exploration of classifiers in the heritage language context, where there is imbalance in use, status, attitudes and institutional support of the two languages (but cf. Wei&Li 2001; Nagy, Chung&Tong 2012; Chan&Nagy 2015).

Conversational Cantonese data from sociolinguistic interviews was used to determine whether classifier use is affected by English contact. Excerpts for 9 speakers were coded for 7 linguistic factors. Speakers were coded for sex, age, ethnic orientation and speaker group (*Gen1* speakers grew up in Hong Kong but are long-term residents in Toronto; *Gen2* speakers grew up in Toronto and have *Gen1* parents; *homeland* speakers were born, raised and live in Hong Kong). Logistic regression modeled the effect of each linguistic factor on the choice of classifier to determine which patterns differ significantly between the three groups.

Main results (N=450):

- Significant conditioning by four linguistic factors
- No significant difference between groups' accuracy
- Frequent overgeneralization of the 'general' *go3* classifier.

By APLA-time, an undergrad research group that started today will have analyzed additional data to determine whether there are significant differences in conditioning effects by group and according to ethnic orientation – raw results suggest no effect of English contact.

### References

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