



The morphological expression of plurality and pluractionality in Mandarin

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Abstract

This paper reports the fact that the morpheme that expresses the plurality of individuals and the one that expresses the plurality of events or actions are the same derivational reduplicant in Mandarin Chinese. It is seen in AABB nouns and AABB verbs. Thus, an instance of cross-categorial quantification is attested morphologically. With respect to word formation, the fact can be explained if the reduplicant is combined with a base first and then a functional element is merged with the combination, and the categorial features are projected from the functional element alone (categorization). Thus, not only roots, but also derivational affixes, can have no categorial features. As a consequence, the existence of acategorial plural markers indicates that number features can be integrated not only after categorization, realized as inflectional affixes or functional elements, but also before categorization, realized as derivational affixes. The same is true of gender and animacy features, cross-linguistically.

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1. Introduction

In Mandarin Chinese, if a base A is reduplicated, a word in an AA pattern is formed. For example, *xing* 'star' has an AA counterpart *xing-xing* 'star'. If a base is composed of two elements, A and B, it is possible to reduplicate A and B respectively, forming an AABB word. In the AABB noun *hua-hua-cao-cao* 'flowers and grasses' in (1a), for example, the two components *hua* 'flower' and *cao* 'grass' are both reduplicated.¹

- (1) a. naxie huahua-caocao
 those RED.flower-grass
 'those flowers and grasses'

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¹ Abbreviations in the glosses of Chinese examples: BA: causative marker; CL: classifier; DE: associative marker or sentence-final particle; EXP: experiential aspect; PRF: perfect aspect; PRG: progressive aspect; RED: reduplicant.

In AABB examples, each root is glossed once, and RED of the total reduplication appears at the left-edge of the gloss line. For another type of total reduplication word, ABAB word (e.g., (13)), RED appears at the right-edge of the gloss line. This is just one way to distinguish the two types of reduplication. Any other ways of labeling the examples should be equally fine.

- b. naxie riri-yeye
 those RED.day-night
 ‘those days and nights’

The empirical issue of this paper is the formal properties of AABB words in Mandarin Chinese. The AABB word in (1a) refers to several flowers and several grasses, and the one in (1b) refers to several days and nights. In addition to plural individuals, AABB words may also denote plural actions or events, as seen in the underlined verbs in (2a) and (2b). Event or action plurality is called pluractionality in some literature (Newman, 1990; also see Corbett, 2000:243).

- (2) a. A-Gui zai jia-li qiao-qiao-da-da.
 A-Gui at home-in RED.knock-beat
 ‘A-Gui beat something repeatedly at home.’
 b. A-Gui ba bieren de wenzhang pin-pin-cou-cou.
 A-Gui BA other DE article RED.merge-combine
 ‘A-Gui combined others’ articles here and there.’

AABB adjectives are also available in the language, as seen in (3a). However, instead of plurality, they express a meaning similar to that of a combination of the correlated AB compound and the degree word *hen* ‘very’, as in (3b).

- (3) a. A-Gui zongshi xiao-xiao-xin-xin.
 A-Gui always RED.small-heart
 ‘A-Gui is always very careful.’
 b. A-Gui zongshi hen xiao-xin.
 A-Gui always very small-heart
 ‘A-Gui is always very careful.’

Individual-denoting AABB words are discussed in Ōta (1958:section 11.3.2), Tang (1979:114), Wu and Shao (2001), and Deng (2013); and action-denoting AABB words are discussed in Ōta (1958:section 16.2.3), Tang (1979:120), Sun (2006), Huang et al. (2009:26), and Deng (2013) (and Feng, 2003 from a phonological perspective). Although other types of reduplicated words, including the state-denoting AABB adjectives such as the one in (3a), have been investigated a lot (e.g., Chao, 1968), individual- and action-denoting AABB words are still understudied. In the previous studies, none of the authors has discussed two theoretical issues: the category issue of AABB words in word formation and the structural position of a special plural morpheme.

In this paper, I will make a generation that individual- and action-denoting AABB words denote a specific type of plurality, greater plurality. I will argue that this plurality is encoded by a derivational affix, the AABB reduplicant; and since the reduplicant in AABB nouns and verbs is the same form, it is integrated in the structure earlier than a categorization operation. The theoretical implications of this claim are that plurality can be represented in various structural positions and that derivational morphology can be acategorical.²

The paper first reports a unified way of encoding plurality in AABB nouns and verbs (section 2), in contrast to adjectives (section 3), and then proposes an account for the invisibility of category features in the forming of plural-denoting AABB words (section 4), and finally, discusses the position where the attested number-marker, as a derivational morpheme, is integrated into a structure (section 5).

2. The shared properties of AABB nouns and verbs

In this section, I show that individual-denoting AABB words and action-denoting AABB words share three properties: their basic plurality meaning, certain constraints on their components, and the derivational morphology. I then propose my analysis of the shared properties.

2.1. The shared greater plural reading of AABB nouns and verbs

2.1.1. Individual-denoting AABB words

According to Ōta (1958:section 11.3.2), early use of individual-denoting AABB words in Chinese was seen in *Shi Jing* ‘Classic of Poetry’ (around BC 1000). Such words have a plural reading in the attested data. As seen in the modern

² The use of the term ‘derivational morphology’ in this paper is descriptive. The paper does not discuss whether the operations in word-formation are fundamentally different from those in building of other kinds of structures.

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