

A Diachronic Semantic Study on the
Chinese Classifier 架 (jià)



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Presentation Outline

Abstract

1. Introduction

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Abstract

❖ Method:

- Diachronic semantic analysis

❖ Objectives:

- Emergence and development of the classifier 架 (jià)
- Perspective of the fundamental role of human cognition and perception (Tai & Wang, 1990)

❖ Conclusion:

- Human categorization, perceptual property of the supporting framework of the referents



1. Introduction

- ❖ Measure words can be found in every language (Tai, 1994)
- ❖ Classifier Languages: Chinese, Thai, etc.



2. Related studies

❖ Classifier definition:

- “...denotes some salient perceived or imputed characteristic of the entity to which an associated noun refers (or may refer)” (Allan, 1997, p. 285)

❖ Chinese classifiers:

- Nouns further categorized
- “reflect conceptual structures” or “arbitrary forms without a conceptual basis” (Tai & Wang, 1990, p. 35)



2. Related studies

❖ Classifier related studies:

- Semantics (Yau, 1988; Tai & Wang, 1990; Tai & Chao, 1994)
- Idiosyncrasies (Lakoff, 1986; Liu et al., 2020)
- Discourse pragmatics (Li, 2001a, 2001b)
- Grammaticalization (Shi, 2001)



2. Related studies

- ❖ Tai (1994): First cognition-based systematic study
 - “...cognitively and semantically motivated and *not* arbitrary” (p. 13)
- ❖ Zhang and Jiang (2016): Cognitive Linguistic (CL) approach
 - “...a semantic relation between a classifier and associated nouns referenced by the classifier” (p. 467)



3. Origin and development of 架 (*jià*)

- ❖ Center for Chinese Linguistics (CCL) Corpus
- ❖ Chinese National Corpus (CNC)
- ❖ Collaborative approach (Jiang, 2017):
 - Synchronic semantic analysis
 - Diachronic development examination



3.1 Etymological origins of the character 架 (*jià*)

❖ 架 (*jià*): 木 (*mù* “wood”) + 加 (*jiā* “to add”)

- Origin: 杙也，所以舉物。《康熙字典》

yì yě, suǒyǐ jǔ wù. <kāngxī zìdiǎn>

[Little wooden stakes, so can hold things. <Kangxi Dictionary>]



3.1 Etymological origins of the character 架 (*jià*)

❖ Original meaning: “a frame,” “a rack,” or “a stand” used to hold up things

(1) 凡以竿爲衣架者，名曰箴。《爾雅·釋器疏》

fán yǐ gān wéi yījià zhě, míng yuē yí. <ěr yǎ·shì qì shū>

[Anything used as a pole to be a clothes hanger is called *yí*.]



3.1 Etymological origins of the character 架 (jià)

- ❖ Verbal meaning: Pre-Qin period (221 B.C.)
 - “to prop up (things with the frame)”
 - “to build”
 - “to support”



3.1 Etymological origins of the character 架 (jià)

❖ Nominal and verbal meaning concurrently used:

- Wei, Jin, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (A.D. 266–589)

(2) 構架斫削，工匠之力也。《論衡》

gòujià zhuó xuē, gōngjiàng zhī lìyě. <lùn héng>

[Constructing, propping, chopping, and cutting, those are craftsmen's abilities.]



3.1 Etymological origins of the character 架 (jià)

❖ Classifier:

- Wei, Jin, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (A.D. 266–589)

(3) 既立宅宇，而所起五間六架。《宋書·五行志》

jì lì zhái yǔ, ér suǒ qǐ wǔ jiān liù jià. <sòng shū·wǔ xíng zhì>

[The residence place has been constructed, it is a place where five rooms and six structures are built up.]



3.2 Diachronic development of the classifier 架 (jià)

- ❖ Tang Dynasties (A.D. 618–907) → Classifier denoting referents need support or bone structural items and racks

(4) 陳鍾十二架，當十二辰之位。《通典》

chén zhōng shí'èr jià, dāng shí'èr chénzhī wèi. <tōng diǎn>

[There are twelve bell chimes, each representing a position for twelve hours.]



3.2 Diachronic development of the classifier 架 (*jià*)

(5) 一架長條萬朵春，嫩紅深綠小窠勻。《唐詩·薔薇》

yī jià cháng tiáo wàn duǒ chūn, nèn hóng shēn lǜ xiǎo kē yún.

<*tángshī·qiángwēi*>

[Thousands of roses grow on a long rose branch, light-red flowers, dark-green vines, and small and well-proportioned buds.]



3.2 Diachronic development of the classifier 架 (*jià*)

❖ Song and Yuan Dynasties (A.D. 960–1368) → Generalization

(6) 陰陰一架紺雲涼。 《全宋词·鷓鴣天》

yīnyīn yī jià gàn yún liáng. <quán sòngcí·zhègū tiān>

[One shady dark-purple color cloud brings coolness.]



3.2 Diachronic development of the classifier 架 (*jià*)

(7) 翠虯寒、一架清香。《全宋詞·聲聲慢》

cùi qiú hán, yī jià qīngxiāng. <*quán sòngcí·shēng shēng màn*>

[The incense in the incense burner carved with the green scorpion pattern is burned out, and there are still strands of fragrance in the room.]



3.2 Diachronic development of the classifier 架 (*jià*)

- ❖ Ming and Qing Dynasties (A.D. 1368–1911) → Full classifier 架 (*jià*) utilization

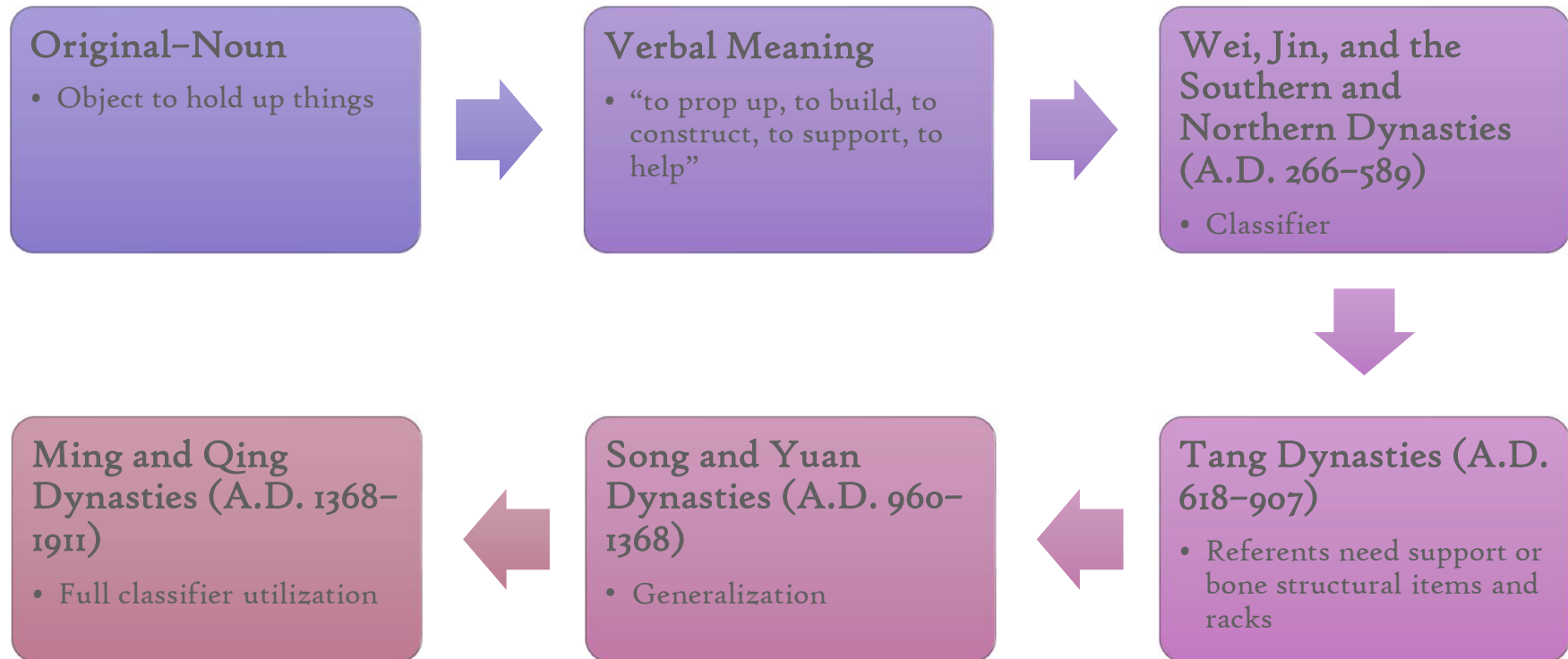
(8) 正中間設一架紙爐。《西遊記》

zhèng zhòng jiān shè yī jià zhǐ lú. <xī yóu jì>

[There is a paper stove in the middle.]



4. Conclusion and implications



4. Conclusion and implications

- ❖ Inherent semantic network
- ❖ Cognition and perception development
- ❖ Classifier 架 (jià):
 - *Not* an arbitrary linguistic device
 - Human categorization, perceptual property of the supporting framework of the referents



4. Conclusion and implications

❖ Future studies:

- Conceptual structure of the classifiers' domains
- Cognitive linguistic approach
- Provide Chinese language learners with a more natural, comprehensive, and efficient acquisition mode



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