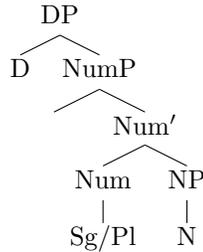


## Chinese Plural Marker -Men

The goal of this paper is to establish the syntactic position and semantic contribution of the Chinese nominal marker, *-men*. There has long been disagreement on the nature of this marker. It has been described as plural, collective, associative, or various combinations thereof (Iljic 1994, Iljic 2005, Norman 1988, Li 1999, Huang et al. 2009, Yang 2005, Niu 2013, and others). I argue that *-men* is a plural marker. I reconsider the evidence from the literature, including fresh judgments on certain contentious examples, as well as provide additional evidence to support my analysis. Adapting the analysis of Japanese in Watanabe (2006) to Chinese, I argue that *-men* and the classifier are both generated in the Num head, see (1). Below DP there is NumP, the head of which contains either a singular or a plural feature and is the sister of NP. This explains quite neatly the most notable property of *-men*, that a noun with *-men* may not occur with a [numeral-classifier], see (2a, b) and (3a, b). The plural marker and a classifier naturally could not occupy the same syntactic position at once.

1



2 a. *xuesheng-men*  
 student-men  
 'the students'

b. \**san ge xuesheng-men*  
 three CL student-MEN

3 a. *wo qu zhao haizi-men*  
 I go find child-MEN  
 'I will go find the children'

b. *wo qu zhao haizi*  
 I go find child  
 'I will go find the/some/a child/children'

(2-3, Li 1999)

It also captures the fact that they perform complimentary semantic roles. Frequently Chinese nouns are described as inherently mass/kind-referring (Chierchia 1998 a, b, Cheng & Sybesma 1999). Following Rullman & You (2003), I will not attempt to elucidate the differences between mass/kind-reference, and will consider Chinese nouns to have General Number. Chinese nouns denote properties, which contain both atomic and non-atomic individuals. Bare nouns are therefore interpreted as unspecified for both number and definiteness. A classifier takes the noun and picks out atomic individuals. These atomic individuals can then combine with numerals and yield phrases such as *san ge haizi* 'three children'. The plural marker *-men* takes the noun and picks out only non-atomic individuals. This is why nouns marked with *-men* are exclusively interpreted as plural and cannot combine with numerals. I suggest that *-men*, in addition to its plural feature, has an uninterpretable animate feature. Generally *-men* attaches to human nouns, but there do seem to be some contexts in which it can attach to other animate elements (Niu 2013). Therefore, I will conservatively posit a [*u*animate] feature for *-men*. This feature can only be satisfied when *-men* c-commands an appropriate noun. When there is a pronoun in D, *-men* moves to D to satisfy this feature. It has accurately been pointed out, that a [numeral-classifier] and a [noun-men] are semantically incompatible (Niu 2015, Kurafuji 2004, Yang 2005), however it is not necessary to regard that as the only impediment to them occurring together. The syntactic structure alone rules out such a combination. In addition, *-men* marked nouns can be regarded as plural and not associative because they do not allow for other elements in the extension of the noun, see (6). This is in contrast to the similar Japanese marker *-tati*, which can allow other elements in its extension and is a collective marker (Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004). Such a finding is not particularly controversial in

regards to common nouns, however proper names with *-men* are claimed to have an associative or collective reading (Iljic 1994, Li 1999, Yang 2005). Based on judgments I've gathered and following Yang (2005) and Niu (2013), I do not accept that a *-men* suffixed proper name, on its own, can receive a collective reading. Rather it gets a plural reading, as in (4). The only time a collective reading is available is when a proper name, which is in the head of a Focus Phrase, is followed by a pronoun with *-men*, see (5). The collective or associative reading of these cases is due to the properties of pronouns, rather than the properties of *-men* (Iljic 1994, Elbourne 2008, Yang 2005, Niu 2015).

- 4 Xiaoqiang-men shenme shihou lai?  
 Xiaoqiang-MEN what time come  
 \*'When will Xiaoqiang and other people come?'  
 'When will all the Xiaoqiangs come?'
- 5 Xiaoqiang ta-men shenme shihou lai?  
 Xiaoqiang (s)he-MEN what time come  
 'When are Zhangsan and others coming?' (4-5, Niu 2015)
- 6 xuesheng-men lai le  
 student-MEN come LE  
 'the students have arrived' (referring to a group of students)  
 \*'the students have arrived' (referring to a group of students and one teacher)

Another notable property of *-men* is that a noun it suffixes may never be preceded by a [numeral-classifier] but pronouns with *-men* may be followed by [numeral-classifier]. I agree with Yang (2005) sentences like (7) should not be regarded as a single DP, but rather two appositive DPs; [[DP<sub>1</sub> ta-men][DP<sub>2</sub> sange (ren)]].

- 7 ta-men san ge (ren)  
 he-MEN three CL (person)  
 'they three'
- 8 \*zhe/ne ge ren-men  
 this/that CL person-MEN (7-8, Li 1999)

The structure proposed also accounts for the grammaticality of a plural demonstrative with noun-men or with a seemingly bare noun, as in (9b) and (10), and the ungrammaticality of a singular demonstrative with noun-men, as in (9a). The plural element, *xie*, adjoins to the demonstrative in D in order to agree with the plural feature in Num. It is not a last resort plural marker, as Yang (2005) claims. In this way, even when *-men* is not present, Chinese maintains a plural singular distinction.

- 9 a. \*na haizi-men  
 that child-MEN
- b. na xie haizi-men  
 that XIE child-MEN  
 'those children' (9, Yang 2005)
- 10 na xie haizi  
 that XIE child  
 'those children'

Thus we can see that *-men* is a plural marker. It has a [+PL] feature and an uninterpretable [uanimate] feature. This structure not only is able to explain the properties of *-men*, but is also able to avoid some of the pitfalls of other analyses. For example, allowing the ungrammatical possibility for *-men* to suffix a demonstrative because it is described as a plural that suffixes an element in D, with no feature-based restrictions to humans or animates (Li 1999); or failing to explain why, since *ta-men san ge haizi* is fine, is *san ge haizi-men* ruled out by semantic incompatibility alone and not the syntactic structure (Yang 2005). The most important point here is that the plural marker *-men* and the classifier both generate in Num, rather than in separate projections, which captures the fact that they perform complementary semantic roles within the DP.