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PANG-HSIN TING

A NOTE ON THE CLASSIFIER *bue53* 尾 IN SOUTHERN MIN

James H.-Y. Tai

National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan

Chinese languages exhibit a great variety of classifiers, offering a wealth of data for the study of classifiers and their implications for human categorization (Tai 1992). The classifier *bue53* 尾 'tail' in Southern Min is particularly interesting in three respects. First, it exists only in Southern Min dialects and a few Cantonese and Hakka dialects which neighbor the area of Southern Min. Second, it didn't exist in Nanbeichao Period (AD 420-589) when the classifier system became full-fledged in the history of Chinese languages. Third, as a classifier, it collocates only with a few nouns such as 'fish' and 'snake,' but not with all of the nouns denoting animals with a tail. In this note, I will briefly comment on the classifier *bue53* regarding the above three respects.

Nouns collocating with *bue53* 尾 in Southern Min include *hi24* 魚 'fish', *cua24* 蛇 'snake', *liŋ24* 龍 'dragon', *he24* 蝦 'prawn', *ho33* *lju55* 泥鰱 'loach', *gia33kaŋ55* 蜈蚣 'centipede', *bun21tʰaŋ24* 蛔蟲 'roundworm', *tɔ21tiŋ33* 蜥蜴 'lizard', *hai55sam55* 海參 'sea cucumber' *hai55ti55* 海豚 'dolphin'. Depending on dialects and individual speakers, all these nouns can also co-occur with the classifier *tɕia23* 隻 (Tai 1996). However, for many speakers in most dialects, *hi24* 魚 'fish' and *cua24* 蛇 'snake' are the two core members of the *bue53* 尾 family (Tai 1996). (Interested readers are referred to Tai 1996 for a detailed statistic analysis on the production data for the collocation between *bue53* 尾 and various nouns.) Based on the prototype theory of classification, it can be proposed that the cluster features for the categorization involving the classifier *bue53* 尾 are (1) animal, (2) long-shaped, (3) with a tail, (4) without legs, and (5) can crawl or swim.

The classifier *bue53* 尾 occurs mainly in Southern Min dialects and some Hakka dialects neighboring Southern Min dialects in both mainland China and Taiwan. Take *hi24* 魚 'fish' for example, the classifier *bue53* 尾

is used in 廈門 and 潮州. However, the classifier 頭 is used in 福州 and 溫州 (漢語方言詞匯, p. 421). Most of the Hakka dialects use the classifiers 條 and 隻 for 魚. According to 李如龍、張雙慶 (1992), among thirty four Hakka dialect localities surveyed, only 秀篆 area uses 尾. The area of 秀篆 is located in southeast coast of Fukian province. Therefore, it is possible that the use is influenced by Southern Min dialects. As a matter of fact, this kind of dialect influence is even more widespread in Taiwan, where most of the Hakka dialects use 尾 as a classifier for 魚. While it is the case that the classifier 尾 is used for the noun 魚 mostly in Southern Min dialects and neighboring Hakka dialects, it also holds true in 昆明, Southwestern Mandarin. It should be also noted that the classifier 尾 is often used for 魚 in more colloquial written Chinese.

Based on the data compiled by 劉世儒 (Liu 1965), the classifier 尾 did not exist in 魏晉南北朝 (AD 420-589) when the classifier system became full-fledged in the history of Chinese languages. According to Liu, there were only three classifiers derived from body parts of animals. They were 口 'mouth', 頭 'head', and 腔 'thoracic cavity'. 頭 was used for fish, snake, and dragon. The following examples are taken from Liu (1965: 91).

王病服之，下蛇十余頭。(金樓子，說蕃篇)
 有白龍三頭降於祠所。(高僧傳，神異篇)
 子真表獻金魚一頭。(南齊書，祥瑞志)
 有大魚十二頭入會稽上虞江。(南齊書，五行志)

It seems that the classifier 尾 first appeared in Tang Dynasty and became well established in Sung dynasty. The following examples are from poems of Tang and Sung dynasties.

肥魚斫千尾。
 (李觀〈寄祖比丞詩〉，大漢和辭典 Vol. 4, p.133)
 有魚數百尾，方來會石下。
 (唐柳宗元〈游黃溪記〉，漢語大字典 Vol. 4, p.13)
 江船百尾泊深灣，鐵纜千環繫常軸。
 (宋梅堯臣〈阻風秦淮令弧度支寄酒詩〉，漢語大字典 Vol. 4, p.13)

We also found the classifier 尾 in fictions written in Ming Dynasty. For example,

當下鮑家買了一尾魚。(儒林外史第二十七回)

However, the classifier 尾 was not found in more colloquial documents in ninth and tenth centuries such as 祖堂集 (p.c. Prof. Tsu-Lin Mei). Thus, the classifier 條 was consistently used for snakes in 祖堂集. For example,

見一條蛇，以杖撩起。
雪峰養得一條蛇，寄著南山意如何。

Nor was the classifier 尾 found in 敦煌變文 (p.c. Dr. Thekla Wiebusch).

It appears that the classifier 尾 was not widely used in Tang and Sung periods, especially in the northern area. Pending further evidence, we can assume that the classifier 尾 was a southern dialectal classifier to start with, and that in competing with the classifier 條 from northern dialects, it lost its territory to 條 except in the most conservative southern dialects, namely, Southern Min.

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