

The interpretation of Mandarin Bare Numeral Phrases: (in)definiteness without articles

The interpretation of Bare Numeral Phrases (BNP) is ambiguous between the **quantity(q)-denoting** reading and **individual (i)-denoting** reading (terminology in Li 1998).

- (1) Two people can complete the task.
 - a. The task requires at least two people to be completed.
 - b. There are two people (e.g., John and Mary) such that they are able to complete the task.

The distinction between the two readings of BNPs can be signaled by whether they bring about the inference that there exists two individuals that satisfy the description.

- (2) a. Two people can complete the task, (but sadly we don't have two people).
 - b. Two people (John and Mary) can complete the task, #(but sadly we don't have two people).

The contrast above is further complicated when the Mandarin data is concerned: with a structure [num-clf-N], Mandarin BNPs in subject positions seem to only allow the q-denoting reading. In order to get the i-denoting reading, the morpheme *you* or *dou* must be inserted overtly.

- (3) liang ge ren keyi wancheng renwu
two CLF person can complete task
'Two people are required to complete the task.'

- (4) **you** introduces indefiniteness:
(you) liang ge ren keyi wancheng renwu
YOU two CLF person can complete task
'**There are two people** who can complete the task.' *contextual anti-uniqueness*

- (5) **dou** introduces definiteness:
liang ge ren (dou) keyi wancheng renwu
two CLF person DOU can complete task
'**The two people** both can complete the task.' *contextual uniqueness*

In this talk, I will explore in depth the distribution of Mandarin BNP and how their i-denoting vs q-denoting interpretations are derived; more importantly, how (in)definiteness arises with the insertion of *you/dou*.