



## A Note on *Caa* in Cantonese and its Grammatical Category

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### Abstract

On par with the colloquial *a grand* for “a thousand dollars” in English, there is the colloquial *caa* for *cin* ‘a thousand dollars’ in Cantonese. By means of distributional properties, *cin* and *caa* will be shown as synonyms, but remain nonequivalent. Finally, *caa* and other synonyms regarding money-multiples will be syntactically argued as classifiers.

### Keywords

*caa*, *zoeng*, money-multiples, classifier, numeral

## 1. Thesis

In light of Kayne's (2012) paper "A note on *grand* and its silent entourage", this paper will discuss the colloquial counterpart *caa* for "a thousand dollars" in Cantonese and its grammatical category as a classifier in a numeral expression.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Motivation by Kayne's (2012) *grand* paper

Objectively, a *grand* is equivalent to "a thousand" if the context is about money, as in:

(1) It'll cost you ten grand/thousand.

However, *grand* and *thousand* are not equivalent, which is exemplified by pronouncing dollars in the sentence, as in:

- (2) a. It'll cost you ten grand (\*dollars).  
b. It'll cost you ten thousand (dollars).

Kayne's suggestion is on the surface:

(3) It'll cost you ten grand.

This is just a reflex of the underlying structure of:

(4) It'll cost you ten THOUSAND BUCKS IN grand TOTAL.

Indicatively, the capitalized are silent categories.

So, *grand* is an adjective, modifying the silent TOTAL, but not a synonym of *thousand*.

In Cantonese, the *grand* counterpart is often symbolized as *caa* for "a thousand dollars". This paper will look at the properties of *caa* and its related members in denoting money expressions in Section (3), will find out what grammatical category *caa* belongs to in Section (4), and Section (5) concludes the paper.

## 3. Properties of *caa* in Cantonese

There is a comparable *grand* for "thousand" in Cantonese, namely *caa*. There is actually a whole series for monetary amounts, with multiple values of million, tens-of-thousand, thousand, hundred and ten, such as:

- (5) a. saam    baak        maan                    =    saam    kau  
          three    hundreds    tens-of-thousand        three    ball  
          'three million dollars'
- b. saam    maan                    =    saam    pei  
          three    tens-of-thousand    three    skin  
          'thirty thousand dollars'

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<sup>1</sup> Romanization in this paper adopts Jyutping system developed by Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.

- c. saam cin = saam caa  
 three thousand three fork  
 ‘three thousand dollars’
- d. saam baak = saam gau  
 three hundred three lump  
 ‘three hundred dollars’
- e. saam sap = saam tiu  
 three ten three string  
 ‘thirty dollars’

This series can be called *kau*, *pei*, *caa*, *gau* and *tiu* money-multiples. These money-multiples literally have nothing to do with the respective money value. They are just used metaphorically to express a very colloquial, jargon, or grass-root style for various multiple values in monetary expressions.

Like *grand*, money-multiples do not syntactically behave the same as math-multiples. Firstly, money-multiples can only be used in monetary cases, but not in other contexts, such as age. For example, in the context of thirty dollars, *sap* can be replaced by *tiu*, as in:

- (6) saam sap = saam tiu  
 three ten three string  
 ‘thirty dollars’

If *tiu* is used in age contexts, the result is unacceptable. That is, *saam tiu* cannot be understood as the age of thirty. Nor are money-multiples be used in pure counting context 1, 2...999, 1000, 1001....where we say *jat cin*, and not *\*jat caa*.

Secondly, because of the conflict of styles, the two series of multiples cannot be interwovenly used in a money expression, as in:

- (7) \*sei pei saam cin  
 four skin three thousand  
 ‘forty three thousand’
- (8) \*sei maan saam caa (c.f. sei maan saam cin )  
 four tens-of-thousand three fork four tens-of-thousand three thousand  
 ‘forty three thousand’

Even if there is no style problem, money-multiples cannot be used in a row to denote a specific money amount. In other words, a money-multiple can only be used to round up an amount, but not to specify its break-down, unlike math-multiples, such as:

- (9) \*sei pei saam caa (c.f. sei maan saam cin )  
 four skin three fork four tens-of-thousand three thousand  
 ‘forty three thousand’

Thirdly, nor can money-multiples be used to replace the *cin maan* (lit: thousand

tens-of-thousand) modifier, as in:

- (10) cin            maan            hou            zaak  
 thousand    tens-of-thousand    luxurious    apartment  
 ‘a luxurious apartment of tens of millions of dollars’
- (11) \*caa pei    hou            zaak  
 fork    skin    luxurious    apartment  
 ‘a luxurious apartment of tens of millions of dollars’

Fourthly, money-multiples can be used with a pre-*gei* or a post-*gei* ‘some’ to denote an approximate amount, such as:

- (12) saam pei / caa / gau    gei    (c.f. saam maan            / cin            / baak    gei )  
 three skin/fork/lump    some            three tens-of-thousand/thousand/hundred    some  
 ‘thirty thousand something/three thousand something/three hundred something’
- (13) Gaa ce    jiu    sing    gei    jaa    pei.  
 Cl    car    cost    up-to    some    twenty    skin  
 ‘The car costs up to several hundred thousand dollars.’
- (14) Keoi    gei    caa    gei    caa    gam    dou.  
 he    some    fork    some    fork    so    gamble  
 ‘He spent several thousands on gambling.’

Recall that *grand*, correlated with *in grand total*, modifies a total or collective amount (Kayne 2012). In Cantonese, while money-multiples do not allow smaller multiples to follow other than the approximate *gei*, it is tempting to generalize that money-multiples are not meant to denote details of the breakdown of a money figure.

Fifthly, given the above contrast between *cin* and *caa*, could *caa* then be treated as an adjective like the adjective *grand* in (15a-b) (Kayne 2012)? Later sections will show that *caa* can only be followed by the noun *je* ‘stuff’. But this does not necessarily mean that *caa* and the rest of the money-multiples series are adjectives. On the one hand, we as native speakers of Cantonese do not know what modification it would mean (16a), and on the other, adverbs (e.g. *sap fan* ‘very’) cannot modify *caa* (16b).

- (15) a. Grand openings are always fun. (Kayne 2012: 73)  
 b. Very grand openings are always fun.
- (16) a. # caa / pei    je  
           fork / skin    stuff  
           (Does not have meanings other than one/ten thousand dollars.)  
 b. \*sap fan    caa / pei    je  
           very    fork / skin    stuff  
           (Does not have meanings other than one/ten thousand dollars.)

In view of the above differences between *cin* and *caa*, what grammatical category should *caa* and the rest of the money-multiples belong to?

#### 4. Syntactic category of money multiples as classifier

##### 4.1. Proof 1: use of *je*

Given that money-multiples are not syntactically equivalent to math-multiples and are not adjectives either, what syntactic category do these multiples belong to? Let's recover what follows them syntactically in money expressions.

Very often, there is no need to spell out any silent word after either type of multiples, as in:

(17) Bou dinwaa m sai sei cin, saam cin gaaudim.  
 Cl mobile not need four thousand three thousand ok

(18) Bou dinwaa m sai sei caa, saam caa gaaudim.  
 Cl mobile not need four fork three fork ok  
 'The mobile doesn't need four thousand, but three thousand is ok.'

However, if it is to be spelt out, it has to be *man* 'dollar' for the *cin* case but not for the *caa* case, as in:

(19) Bou dinwaa m sai sei cin man, saam cin man gaaudim.  
 Cl mobile not need four thousand dollar three thousand dollar ok

(20) \*Bou dinwaa m sai sei caa man, saam caa man gaaudim.  
 Cl mobile not need four fork dollar three fork dollar ok  
 'The mobile doesn't need four thousand, but three thousand is ok.'

The non-match between *caa* and *man* is also observed in the *grand* case where *grand* cannot be used with dollars, as in:

(21) \*a grand dollars

Instead, if *je* 'stuff' substitutes for *man*, the *caa* case is acceptable and the *cin* case is not, as in:

(22) \*Bou dinwaa m sai sei cin je, saam cin je gaaudim.  
 Cl mobile not need four thousand stuff three thousand stuff ok

(23) Bou dinwaa m sai sei caa je, saam caa je gaaudim.  
 Cl mobile not need four fork stuff three fork stuff ok  
 'The mobile doesn't need four thousand, but three thousand is ok.'

Hence, in monetary expressions, there is a selectional restriction between the math-multiple and *man*, as well as between the money-multiple and *je*.

When money expressions are used as attributive modifiers, the patterns of (non-)use of *man* and *je* look similar, as in:

(24) a. saam cin man ge dinwaa  
 three thousand dollar GE mobile

- b. saam caa je ge dinwaa  
 three fork stuff GE mobile
- c. \*saam cin (ge) dinwaa  
 three thousand GE mobile
- d. \*saam caa (ge) dinwaa  
 three fork GE mobile  
 ‘a mobile of three thousand dollars’

At the presence of *ge*-particle (24a-b), the whole money expression with *man* or *je* can modify the value of the mobile. However, if *man* or *je* becomes silent (24c-d), the whole nominal is ungrammatical regardless the presence of *ge*-particle.

For the time being, let us not discuss the category of *man* ‘dollar’, which represents a unit for measuring money amount. As *je* is definitely a noun in Cantonese, it is tempting to suggest that the money-multiple *caa*, together with the rest of the money-multiple series, is a classifier. As shown below:

- (25) [saam]<sub>numeral</sub> [caa]<sub>classifier</sub> [je]<sub>noun</sub>  
 three fork stuff  
 ‘three thousand dollars’

This suggestion can be supported by the idea that *maan* ‘tens-of-thousand’, *cin* ‘thousand’, *baak* ‘hundred’ and *sap* ‘ten’ are regarded as collective classifiers in Cheung (2007).

If *caa* is analyzed as a classifier, what about the rest of the money-multiples? All money-multiples but *gau* can be followed by *je*. Even if the hundred *gau* does not match *je*, it can do so with another noun *seoi* ‘water’, as in:

- (26) a. saam maan man = saam pei je  
 three tens-of-thousand dollar three skin stuff  
 ‘thirty thousand dollars’
- b. saam cin man = saam caa je  
 three thousand dollar three fork stuff  
 ‘three thousand dollars’
- c. saam baak man = saam gau seoi  
 three hundred dollar three lump water  
 ‘three hundred dollars’
- d. saam sap man = saam tiu je  
 three ten dollar three string stuff  
 ‘thirty dollars’

However, this pattern is broken when the numeral comes to the one-value. Consider the case of three dollars:

- (27) saam man  
 three dollar  
 ‘three dollars’

- (28) *saam gai je*  
 three chicken stuff  
 ‘three dollars’

In *saam man* ‘three dollars’, there is no multiple word between *saam* and *man*, unlike the rest of the series. Corresponding to this gap in the money-multiple series is the introduction of *gai* ‘chicken’, which can subsequently be followed by *je* as other non-one-value cases do. As *je* is a noun and *saam* is a numeral, the appropriate category of *gai* should also be a classifier, like *tiu*, *gau*, *caa* and *pei*. As summarized below:

**Table 1.**

Monetary expressions	Numeral	Classifier	Noun
<i>saam maan man</i>	<i>saam</i>	<i>pei</i>	<i>je</i>
<i>saam cin man</i>	<i>saam</i>	<i>caa</i>	<i>je</i>
<i>saam baak man</i>	<i>saam</i>	<i>gau</i>	<i>seoi</i>
<i>saam sap man</i>	<i>saam</i>	<i>tiu</i>	<i>je</i>
<i>saam man</i>	<i>saam</i>	<i>gai</i>	<i>je</i>

Despite the asymmetry between the one-value and the non-one-value cases in the math-multiple series, the colloquial series exhibits a symmetrical supply of money-multiples from *pei* to *gai* in association with the noun *je* or *seoi*. This shows that the colloquial series retains the Numeral-Classifier-Noun order where all of the money-multiples are classifiers.<sup>2</sup>

The use of a colloquial word to stand for multiples in monetary expressions is not an isolated phenomenon. In the age context of the value of ten years, *sap* can be replaced by *zoeng* ‘sheet’, such as:

- (29) *saam sap seoi* = *saam zoeng*  
 three ten year three sheet  
 ‘thirty years old’

Interestingly, although this is an age context, the same *je* can be recovered after *zoeng* as in previous monetary cases, i.e.

- (30) *saam zoeng je*  
 three sheet stuff  
 ‘thirty years old’

<sup>2</sup> Recall that in Au Yeung (2005, 2007), it was suggested that the lack of a multiplier in the one-value case in ordinary numbers (e.g. *saam* ‘three’, unlike the presence of a multiplier in *saam sap* ‘thirty’, *saam baak* ‘three hundred’, etc.) is compensated with the classifier *go*, forming the multiple series *go-sap-baak-cin-maan*. This series looks parallel in the monetary case where *saam man* ‘three dollars’ is also supplied with *gai* in *saam gai je* ‘three dollars’ (lit.: three chicken stuff), forming the series *gai-tiu-gau-caa-pei*.

Again, since *je* is a noun and *saam* is a numeral, *zoeng* can then be claimed as a classifier, i.e.

- (31) [saam]<sub>numeral</sub> [zoeng]<sub>classifier</sub> [je]<sub>noun</sub>  
 three sheet stuff  
 ‘thirty years old’

So whether the colloquial multiple correlates with an expression of money or age, it can be analyzed as a classifier.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.2 Proof 2: use of *gei* and packing between classifiers

With the use of *gei*, the packing between a measuring unit pair shows similar word ordering as for *caa* and *zoeng*. When one thousand dollars is packed into *caa*, i.e. 1000 *man* = 1 *caa*, as in (32), *man* is no longer valid since it is a unit lower than *caa*.

- (32) saam cin gei man → saam caa gei (\*man)  
 three thousand some dollar three folk some dollar  
 ‘three thousand something dollars’

The same applies to age. When 10 years old is packed into 1 *zoeng*, i.e. 10 *seoi* ‘years’ = 1 *zoeng*, as in (33), *seoi* is unacceptable either since it is a unit lower than *zoeng*.

- (33) saam sap gei seoi → saam zoeng gei (\*seoi)  
 three ten some age three sheet some age  
 ‘thirty something years old’

Similarly, *leimai* and *onsi* are respectively lower than *mai* and *bong* (100 *leimai* ‘cm’ = 1 *mai* ‘m’; 16 *onsi* ‘ounce’ = 1 *bong* ‘pound’), and hence the contrast in (34-35).

<sup>3</sup> Although *caaje* ‘thousand stuff’ does not have definite interpretation but indefinite only (i-ii), this does not represent an argument against *caa* as a classifier because other measuring classifiers (e.g. *bong* ‘pound’) do not form definite Cl-N phrases either (iii-iv). The reason may be that neither of the two classifiers individualizes its head nouns.

- (i) \*Caa je m gin-zo. (definite Cl-N)  
 fork stuff not appear-PFV  
 ‘The thousand dollars disappeared.’
- (ii) Jiu sing caa je. (indefinite Cl-N)  
 need whole fork stuff  
 ‘It needs a whole thousand dollars.’
- (iii) \*Bong ngaujuk m gin-zo. (definite Cl-N)  
 pound beef not appear-PFV  
 ‘The one-pound beef disappeared.’
- (iv) Jiu sing bong ngaujuk. (indefinite Cl-N)  
 need whole pound beef  
 ‘It needs the beef of one whole pound.’



- (34) *saam baak gei leimai* → *saam mai gei* (\**leimai*)  
 three hundred some centimetre three metre some centimetre  
 ‘three hundred something centimetres → three something metres’
- (35) *saam sap gei onsi* → *loeng bong gei* (\**onsi*)  
 three ten some ounce two pound some ounce  
 ‘thirty something ounces → two pounds something’

Given that *seoi*, *man*, *onsi/bong*, *leimai/mai* are classifiers for measuring dimensions (Chao 1980), since these units exhibit their own packing pattern summarized as follows:

- (36) a. Money: 1000 *man* = 1 *caa* ‘1000 dollars = 1 fork’  
 b. Age: 10 *seoi* = 1 *zoeng* ‘10 years = 1 sheet’  
 c. Length: 100 *leimai* = 1 *mai* ‘100 cm = 1m’  
 d. Weight: 16 *onsi* = 1 *bong* ‘16 ounces = 1 pound’

The units *caa* and *zoeng* can naturally be analogized as classifiers because they pack a certain amount or quantity from a lower unit into a higher one.

#### 4.3. Proof 3: classifier-*gei* sequence

The association between a unit and *gei* does not pose a problem for the unit to be argued as a classifier because collective classifiers such as *soeng* ‘box’ and *doi* ‘bag’ can also be followed by *gei*, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

Numeral	Classifier- <i>gei</i>	Noun
<i>saam</i> ‘three’	<i>soeng gei</i> ‘box’	<i>hanglei</i> ‘luggage’
<i>saam</i>	<i>doi gei</i> ‘bag’	<i>pinggwo</i> ‘apples’
<i>saam</i>	<i>caa gei</i> ‘fork’	<i>je</i> ‘stuff’
<i>saam</i>	<i>zoeng gei</i> ‘sheet’	<i>je</i> ‘stuff’
<i>saam</i>	<i>mai gei</i> ‘metre’	<i>paaudou</i> ‘track’
<i>saam</i>	<i>bong gei</i> ‘pound’	<i>ngaujuk</i> ‘beef’

No matter what category *gei* belongs to, the middle column in Table 2 at least shows that it is common for some particular type of classifiers to be associated with *gei*. Hence, one of the candidates is the money-multiple *caa*.

### 5. Implications and conclusion

In the process of transforming classifiers from lower to higher values, some parts of a numeral with a lower classifier is packed together into the higher classifier, as in Table 3:

**Table 3.**

Numeral	Classifier		Numeral	Classifier
<i>saam baak gei</i>	<i>leimai</i> ‘cm’	→	<i>saam</i>	<i>mai gei</i> ‘m’
<i>saam maan gei</i>	<i>go</i> ‘C’	→	<i>saam</i>	<i>soeng gei</i> ‘box’
<i>saam cin gei</i>	<i>man</i> ‘dollar’	→	<i>saam</i>	<i>caa gei</i> ‘fork’
<i>saam sap gei</i>	<i>seoi</i> ‘year’	→	<i>saam</i>	<i>zoeng gei</i> ‘sheet’

From a syntactic point of view, what was originally regarded as part of a numeral, e.g. *baak* in *saam baak* ‘three hundred’ as in the case of *leimai* ‘cm’ is now packed into a higher classifier, *mai* ‘m’, leaving the leftmost digit *saam* in the numeral position. In this connection, there seems to be a dynamic relationship between a numeral and a classifier. How could the traditional nominal structure, such as the DP model in Tang (1990) or the CIP model in Cheng and Sybesma (1999), better captures this subtle derivation between the two categories should be left for future research.

Looking back at the case of *caa*, although the traditional math-multiples and the money-multiples are equivalent to each other in terms of monetary values, they are just synonyms, as Kayne elaborates in the *grand* paper. While *grand* in English is not equivalent to thousand syntactically, *caa* in Cantonese is not either.

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## 淺談粵語“一叉嘢”及其詞類特點

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### 提要

一千元在英語裏有個通俗的叫法“a grand”，而粵語也可把一千元叫作“一叉”。根據不同的分佈特點，本文將會揭示“一千”、“一叉”只是近義詞，兩者並不等價。最後，本文將論證“叉”及其餘的金錢倍數詞為量詞。

### 關鍵詞

“叉”，“張”，金錢倍數詞，量詞，數詞