Classifiers are for what? Revisiting the structure of nominal projections in East Asian languages.

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This talk considers a range of fundamental questions relating to the role that numeral classifiers play in the syntactic structuring of nominal expressions and how classifiers are syntactically combined with other elements in nominal projections. The presentation examines recent work bearing on the issue of whether nominal projections involving classifiers are uniformly right-branching in Chinese, and left-branching in Japanese and Korean, drawing on discussions relating to Chinese in Y.-H. A. Li (2012, 2013, 2014), Zhang (2013) and Her and Tsai (2019), for Japanese in Kitahara (1993), Watanabe (2006, 2010), and Saito, Lin and Murasugi (2008), and for Korean in Park (2008), Choi (2011), An (2018) and Simpson and Park (2019). In the first part of the talk, the syntactic properties of classifiers manifested in Vietnamese (Simpson and Ngo 2018) are used to support the view in various works that classifiers combine syntactically with nouns before classifier-noun/NP constituents are subsequently merged with numerals and other quantifiers, contra the general proposal in Bale and Coon (2014). The second part of the talk scrutinizes the ways that the assumed general head-directionality present in a language may affect analyses of the structure of nominal projections, and asks what different kinds of analyses might be supported if the head parameter does not regulate all head-complement relations within a language in a uniform way, as indeed found in languages such as German and Bengali, but instead applies in a domain specific way subject to the Final Over Final Constraint (Sheehan, Biberauer, Roberts, and Holmberg 2017).

Her, One-Soon Her and Hui-Chin Tsai. 2019. Left is Right, Right is not: On the Constituency of the Classifier Phrase in Chinese. Language and Linguistics 20.4.