

A Comparative Analysis Of Chinese And Nyanja Noun Classifiers

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Abstract

Though English is the official language of Zambia, there are also seven regional languages: Lozi, Luvale, Lunda, Kaonde, Tonga, Bemba, and Nyanja. Though institutions mainly use English as the language of instruction, it is also assumed that learners also tend to use their regional languages either at home or in their daily conversations. Therefore, the main aim of the paper is to carry out a comparative analysis of Chinese (second language/target language) noun classifiers and Nyanja (Chichewa) noun classifiers. The work and results in this paper came as a result of the author's continuous observation of the learners of Chinese through his five experiences of teaching the Chinese language at the Confucius Institute at the University of Zambia. Therefore, the author went a step further from the usual research done between Chinese and English to research between local languages (regional language) and Chinese language. By so doing the study attempts to; compare the Nyanja and Chinese noun classifiers, and find out whether the acquisition of Chinese classifiers will be affected by the learners whose mother language is Nyanja. It was therefore established that though both Nyanja and Chinese have noun classifier systems, these two languages belong to two different noun classifier systems, resulting in having different numeral positions. This difference is very crucial in the acquisition of Chinese classifiers by Zambian learners of Chinese. Consequently, in the teaching of the Chinese language in Zambia, the teachers should be aware of the major differences between the two languages, thereby helping learners master Chinese classifiers.

Keywords - Classifiers, Nyanja, Chinese, Comparison, Second Language

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dixon (1982), defines two different forms of linguistic categorization according to their various noun system namely lexical syntactic noun classification and grammatical category noun class. The lexicon-syntactic form includes the numeral classifier systems, such as in Chinese. In contrast, the grammatical noun system includes the Niger-Congo language as Bantu language and in this case Nyanja (Chichewa). That is to say though both Nyanja and Chinese have noun classifier systems, it's important at this point that these two languages belong to two different noun classifier systems. As Allan (1977), puts it Concordial classifier languages are those in which classifying formatives are affixed (usually prefixed) to nouns, plus their modifiers, predicates, and pro-forms.

Watkins (1937) also defines concordial as a method of syntax, a technique of mooring the basic concept of a sentence to each other by a formal expression of their relationship within the sentence. Furthermore, nouns in Nyanja are composed of two formalities: stem and prefix, though in some cases only the stem is represented. Hence, in those cases, the noun used without a singular prefix will require prefixation in the plural. That is to say, noun prefixes indicate numbers with certain exceptions, and together with the concordial agreement constitute a morphological system that divides the noun into several class genders. On the other hand, the stem is that portion of the noun to which the affixes are appended, and a change in prefix indicates a change in number while a change in affix indicates derivational concepts.

On the contrary, Qian Hun (1993) Chinese language is a numerical classifier language. That is to say, an unbound morpheme is obligatory in a numerical nominal phrase under specifiable syntactic conditions. For example, one teacher/a teacher will be 一位老师. Salehuddin and Winskel (2009), define a numerical classifiers as a syntactic-semantic category that is common in Sino-Tibetan, Atlantic-Congo, and Austronesian languages. Adams and Conklin (1973), and Allan (1977), a numerical classifier system share some aspects in their classification of nouns by classifying objects based on primary parameters such as distinction between animate and inanimate objects and between human and non-human distinction. Byeong-Uk Yi (2011), argues that numeral classifiers are para-numerals for one serving as numerative (the para-numeral account). That is to say, common nouns in the Chinese language do not usually combine directly with the numeral, for example;

1. three cows /三头牛
2. eight teacher/八位老师

From the above two examples, Byeong-Uk Yi (2011), concluded that expressions, where a word (头/位) accompanies the number (three/eight) and accords a noun (牛/老师), are called numeral classifiers.

Nyanja also called Chichewa in Malawi is a Bantu language that is spoken in Zambia's eastern and Lusaka Provinces of Zambia, and several countries in southern Africa. Furthermore, the language is examinable at the junior and secondary examinations in the named provinces. In contrast, the Chinese language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and this implies that it is not surprising for Zambian learners to have challenges in acquiring Chinese classifiers.

Nonetheless, seems to exist some similarities and differences exist between Nyanja (Chichewa). Due to intralingua errors, and native language transfer, the similarities and differences between Chinese and Nyanja classifiers may impact the acquisition of Chinese classifiers by Zambian speakers of Chinyanja). Therefore, this paper aims to analysis the following:

1. To compare the Nyanja and Chinese classifiers.
2. To find out whether the acquisition of Chinese classifiers will be affected by the learners whose mother Language is Nyanja; and
3. Help provide reference material to the development of local materials in the teaching of the Chinese language In Zambia.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper will be based on the contrastive theory. According to Gast (2013:1) cited by Linda C. Nkamigbo, and Greg O. Obiamalu (2016) in a paper titled; Phonological Differences and the Phonological Problems of Igbo Learners of Chinese. "Contrastive analysis investigates the differences between pairs (or small sets) of languages against the background of similarities and to provide input to applied disciplines such as foreign language teaching and translation studies." According to Lado (1957) cited by Richard and Mushangwe (2014) in a paper titled; comparative analysis of Shona and Chinese Prepositions, states that 'those elements that are similar to the student's first language will be simple for the students, and those elements that are different will be difficult for the student'. Furthermore, Mushangwe and Richard (2014) also argue that based on the second language theory students acquiring the Chinese language are expected to be affected by the first language since it is assumed that the student's first language will have an impact whether positive or negative on the learning of the second language. Therefore this, research is based on the assumption that Nyanja language speakers learning the Chinese language are likely to be influenced by noun classification structure and type from their mother language, thereby affecting their acquisition of Chinese classifiers.

Therefore, the hypothesis that is being tested in this research is:

1. Are the differences that exist between the two language classifiers going to have an impact on the acquisition of Chinese classifiers by the Zambian speakers of Nyanja (Chewa)?
2. Does the error in acquiring Chinese classifiers emerge from Nyanja or English?
3. How can those differences help the learner acquire the Chinese classifiers?

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Wanjuan, Gift, and Cheng (2021), states that 'the process of second language acquisition success depends on a strong belief held by learners about the type of language under study, the existence of aptitude, their expectation about achievement, and teaching methodology etcetera. On the other hand, one of the motivators of second language acquisition is knowing the differences and similarities between the mother language and the target language. As the quote by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (<https://www.british-study.com>) puts this way "Those who know no foreign language know nothing of their mother tongue", and sheds light on the benefits of understanding more about one's language while learning another language. Therefore, Mumba and Kaira (2013) argue that the learner is vividly encouraged to use his/her linguistic repertoire to enhance learning opportunities.

Nonetheless, several language teaching researches have been done at home and abroad. For example, Banda, F. and Mwanza, D.S.(2015) in a paper titled; Language-in-education Policy and Linguistic Diversity in Zambia noted that that if the goal of teaching is to enable learners to access learning, their home languages and literacies should be allowed in the classroom as stepping stones to accessing learning; Mumba .and Kaira G.(2013) paper titles; "Foreign language learning in Zambia: the French classroom experience" also argue that foreign language learning has been considered to be an added value to education attainment in every society. Despite its obvious advantages at country, institutional, and personal levels, the teaching and learning of French in Zambia have not yielded the expected results.

Furthermore, in the acquisition of Chinese as a second in Zambia, several works have been done too. Thebe Lungu (2018) carried out Research on the Errors of the Possibility of Complement Grammatical Structure in the Chinese Language. She pointed out that African students as well as other foreign students use various strategies to avoid making errors such as avoiding to use of this structure but these strategies lead to more errors. Therefore, the possibility of complement grammatical structure has become one of the focuses of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Zulu James(2018), in a paper titled The Error Analysis of the Acquisition of the Chinese Adversarial Conjunctions by Zambian Students; Taking the Confucius Institute at the University of Zambia as an Example, pointed out several errors that Zambian learners of Chinese make and their possible causes. Pointed out that the student's mother language has an impact on the acquisition of Chinese Adversarial Conjunctions.

In addition, Mushangwe (2012, 2013) carried out a comparative analysis between Shona and Chinese tones and a comparative analysis between Shona and Chinese vowels and the research findings show that the Chinese language's vowel system is more complex than the Shona vowel system. It is therefore assumed that though native speakers of the Shona language might find it challenging to acquire the Chinese vowel system, however, if students are advised in advance about the differences between the Chinese and Shona vowels which are represented by the same letters in the writing systems of these two languages, they (students) are likely to have less pronunciation errors in Chinese since they will not borrow the Shona pronunciation strategies. Therefore, from the abovementioned works, we also conclude that there is a great need for research to be undertaken between Chinese and Zambian languages, thereby helping learners and teachers master the differences and differences between the two languages.

Finally, since the Chinese language is now examinable in grades 9 and 12 in Zambia according to the Ministry of Education (2019), therefore, it's important to carry out a lot of research regarding the comparative analysis between the Zambian local language and Chinese language. Therefore, this paper attempts to carry out a comparative analysis between Nyanja (Chichewa) and Chinese classifiers, thereby helping Zambian learners of the Chinese language see the similarities and differences between Chinese and Nyanja (Chichewa) classifiers.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study made use of a qualitative research design. Alison and Susan (2005) pointed out that the term qualitative research is associated with a range of different methods, perspectives, and approaches. According to Tetnowski and Damico (2001), states that qualitative research aims to study individuals and events in their natural settings. Furthermore, Aspers and Corte (2019), define qualitative research as the process of analyzing empirical data iteratively to make distinctions and to provide the scholarly community an improved understanding of a particular phenomenon. Therefore, in order, to analyze the similarities and differences between Nyanja and Chinese noun classifiers, journals, thesis, books, materials from the library, and articles were reviewed; namely, Allan(1977); classifiers, Thokhozani (2011); Chichewa noun classifiers, Watkins(1943); the grammar of Chichewa, Greville (1987); gender agreement in Chichewa, etc. as some of the major source of data for this research. Therefore, we hope the data at our disposal will aid in the development of reference material in the teaching of the Chinese language in Zambian.

V. COMPARISON OF THE CHINESE AND NYANJA NOUN CLASSIFIERS

This section compares and analyses the Chinese and Nyanja (noun classifiers)

Comparison of the Chinese and Nyanja (Chichewa) Nyanja (Chichewa) noun classifiers

According to Collins (1962), Concordial classifier languages are those in which classifying formatives are affixed (usually prefixed) to nouns, plus their modifiers, predicates, and pro-forms. Many African (Bantu and Semi-Bantu) and Australian languages are of this type. Sam A. Mchombo (2002), argues that the main feature of Bantu languages is their system of noun classification. He further stated that nouns in Nyanja (Chichewa) -Bantu languages traditionally display a bi-morpheme structure. For example;

Table 1.

S/N	Singular	Prefix	Plural	Prefix
1.	Chi-soti /hat	chi	Zi-soti/hats	Zi
2.	M-kondo/spear	M(u)	Mi-kondo/spears	Mi
3.	mu-nthu/person	Mu	a-authu/persons	a

From the above examples, we may conclude that the noun consists of a prefix and a stem. The prefix encodes information relating to number and gender, and the gender system is that of natural gender.

Number of noun classifiers

According to Thokozani Kunkeyani (2007) Nouns of Bantu languages are classified grammatically according to prefixes whether overt or null, and the concordial agreement associated with them. It has been observed that noun classes can also be semantically classified. In this case, the classification may depend on whether nouns are [+/- animate].

Thokozani Kunkeyani (2007) , Further, pointed out that Nyanja (Chichewa) has several classes, though their total number is dependent on the scholar or researcher. Therefore, this paper will adopt classes as proposed by Mchombo and Bresnan (1987) as shown below;

Table 2. Nyanja (Chichewa) Noun Classes and their Concordial Agreement Prefixes by Mchombo and Bresnan (1987)

S/N	Class	Example	Gloss	SM	OM
1.	1. 1A	Mlenje	Hunter/一位猎人	a, u	Mu
2.	2	Alenje	Hunters/几位猎人	a	Wa
3.	3	Mkango	Lion/一只狮子	u	U
4.	4	Mikango	Lions/几只狮子	i	I
5.	5	Phiri	Mountain /一座山	li	li
6	6	Mapiri	Mountains /几座山	a	A
7.	7	Chipewa	Hat /一顶帽子	chi	chi
8.	8	Zipewa	Hats/几顶帽子	zi	zi
9.	9	Njuchi	Bee/一只蜜蜂	i	I
10.	10	njuchi	Bees/一群蜜蜂	zi	zi
11.	11	kamwana	Small child/一个小孩子	ka	ka
13.	12	tiana	Small children/几个小孩子 be	ti	
14.	13	ulalo	Bridge/一座桥	u	U
15	(6)	maulalo	Bridges/几座桥	a	A
16	15	kuimba	To sing, singing/唱歌, 在唱起歌来	ku	ku
17	16	pamsika	At the market/在市场	pa	pa
18	17	kumudzi	To the village/前往农村	ku	ku
19.	18	M'nyumba	In the house/在家里	mu	mu

Analysis of the grammatical noun classification in Chichewa.

1. According to Mchombo and Bresnan (1987), there are 18 noun classes (classifiers) in Nyanja (Chichewa).
2. From Table 2 (see the appendix) we may see that classes (NC1-NC14) are related, for example, class 2 is class one plural (NC1- M-lenje/hunter/一个猎人, its plural is in NC2-A-lenje/hunters/几个猎人).NC7- Chipewa/hat/一顶帽子, its plural belongs to NC8-Zi-pewa/hats/几顶帽子. We also see that NC11- kamwana/Small child/一个小孩子, has a plural-Tiana/small children/几个小孩子 belonging to NC12.
3. The word lion in Chichewa is made up of two parts; the prefix “mu” and the stem “kango”. Therefore, the lion is mkango.
4. The word lions contains two parts two “mi” which is the prefix for plural (for plural the prefix mu changes to mi that is to say changes in prefix represent a change in numbers.), and the stem “kango” giving us the noun “mikango”
5. The word person has the prefix “mu” and the stem “nthu” giving us the noun “munthu”, while the word persons will be prefixed “an” and the stem “nthu” giving us the plural “anthu”
6. The word mountains has the prefix “ma” and the stem “Phiri” giving us the noun “mapiri”
7. The word village has two parts, the prefix “mu” and the stem “dzi” giving us the noun “mudzi”
8. The village has two prefixes “ku and mu” plus the stem “dzi” giving the noun phrase (NP) “kumudzi”
9. The word relative has two parts prefix “mu” and stem “bale” giving us the noun “mbale” while for plural will be the prefix “a” and the stem “bale” the noun “abale” for relatives.
10. The word teacher has two parts the prefix “mu” and the stem “phunzisti” giving us the noun “muphunzisti”, while for plural the prefix “a” and stem “phunzisti” giving us the noun “aphunzisti” for teachers.
11. From the above sentences, we may conclude that the prefix “mu” is usually used for people and animals. However, there are also some nouns without prefixes in the singular but added in the plural. For example;

The word dog only has the stem “galu” giving the noun galu, while for dogs the prefix “a” will be added to the stem “galu” giving us the noun “agalu”.

The noun duck has no prefix in the singular, only the stem “bakha”, however, the noun ducks have the prefix “a” and the stem “bakha” gives us the noun “abakha”.

Hence, in the above two sentences, we may conclude that the prefix “a” has been used in nouns without a prefix in the singular to express their plural.

In addition, Thokozani Kunkeyani (2007), the Chichewa prefix can also be used to form nouns That is to say when a verb is added to the prefix a different word will be produced. For example;

1. The noun “a spy” is derived from the prefix “ka” and the verb “soza/to spy” to form the word “kasoza” meaning a spy.
2. The noun phrase “a very mobile person” is derived from the prefix “ka” and the verb “deruka/to appear in flash” (ka+deruka) gives us the noun phrase “kaderuka” meaning a very mobile person.

Numerals in Nyanja

This is a very important section of the paper because it will draw up the structure for numbers in Chichewa. From the above analysis (4.1.1), we have seen that a change in prefix indicates the change of the number, that is from singular to plural for example Mu-nthu/persons to a-nthu/persons. However, to help Zambian learners of Chinese masters Chinese classifiers, we also need to specify how many people there are, how many teachers are in the school, and so on. For example;

mu-nthu m-modzi

Mu=prefix, nthu=stem=second prefix following the order of the first one, and modzi is the numeral =one.

Therefore munthu modzi /one person/一个人

a-nthu a-wiri

A=prefix, nthu=stem, “a” second prefix following the order of the first prefix (a=plural for People, animals, etc), while wiri=numeral two (number 2) Therefore, the phrase

“anthu awiri” means two people/两个人

a-phunzisti a-sanu

a=prefix for plural, phunzisti=stem (for teacher), “a”=prefix according to the first one, while sanu=five (numeral).

Therefore, the phrase “aphunzisti a sanu” means five teachers/五个老师.

From the above phrase, we draw the following conclusion;

1. the second prefix on the numeral “a-sanu” modifies the numeral and the modifier takes after the main prefix for example in “a-phunzisti” where “a” is the main prefix showing the plural of the head noun. Therefore these prefixes express a concord relationship (agreement) which is the most important feature of Bantu languages.
2. The numeral noun formula or structure in Chichewa will be as follows;
Prefix (main prefix showing class) + stem + prefix (following after the main one) +numeral.
Abbreviated as “P₁+S+P₂+N”.

Chinese noun classifiers

According to Aikhenvald (2000, 102), numeral classifiers are widespread in the languages of East and Southeast Asia, Oceania, and South America. As Wang (1994) puts it that they are called numeral classifiers because classifiers occur obligatorily in numeral phrases in counting constructions. According to Qian Hun (1993), the Chinese language is a numerical classifier language. That is to say, an unbound morpheme is obligatory in a numerical nominal phrase under specifiable syntactic conditions. For example;

One teacher - Numeral +Noun

yíwèilǎoshī

一位老师; Numeral +Numeral classifier+noun

Mu-phunzisti m-modzi; Prefix (main prefix showing class) + stem + prefix (following after the main one) +numeral.

Two mountains; Numeral +Noun

liǎngzuòshān

两座山; Numeral +Numeral classifier+noun

Ma-piri a-wiri; Prefix (main prefix showing class) + stem + prefix (following after the

Main one) +numeral.

Furthermore, Denny and Allan(1976,1977), numerical classifiers typically provide information about physical properties such as animacy, shape, arrangement function properties such as hand tools, circles, and so on, or the social status of the referent of the head noun. For example,

yìzhāngzhuōzi

1. 一张桌子

The classifiers 张 represent the properties such as flat objects. Therefore from the classifier, we can tell that the noun (桌子) has a flat surface. We can also say 一张床/one bed.

yìtiáokùzi

2. 一条裤子

The classifiers 条 represent the properties such as the length of objects. Therefore, from the classifier, we may tell

yìtiáohé

that the noun (裤子) is long。 We may also say 一条河/a river.

yízuòqiáo

3. 一座桥

The classifier 座 represents a settled or sitting object. That is to say, the object is well stationed in one position.

yízuò

Therefore, from the classifier 座, we may conclude that 桥 is stationed or unmovable. We may also say 一座

shān

山 /a mountain

liǎngzhīxióngmāo

6. 两只熊猫

The classifier carries the properties of animals, that is to say, it's the universal classifier for animals. Therefore from the sentence we may conclude that the noun is an animal. Hence, According to Hu (1993), it will be an insult in Chinese to say 一只人 (one-animal person). Therefore, we may also say 两只老虎, 一只狗, and so on.

yìkēshù

7. 一棵树

The classifier 棵 is used for trees, and plants for example cabbage. Hence upon seeing the classifier 棵 in the sentence, we may conclude what the noun is, e.g. plant or tree like in this case. Therefore, we may say 一颗大白菜, 一颗芒果树 等等。

liǎnggèhái

9. 两个孩子

The classifier 个 is referred to as the classifier for general nouns. For example people, children, and students. Therefore we may say 三个学生, 两个孩子等等。 However, when showing respect or honoring people we use 位, 名。 For example, we say, 三位老师, 一名律师等等。

sānméijīnpái

10. 三枚金牌

The classifier 枚 used for small objects like coins, eggs, and medals. Therefore, we may say 一枚古币, 两枚邮票等等。

Therefore, the above ten sentences have revealed the relation Of between the numeral, numeral classifiers, and the head noun Systems of Numeral Classification

Number of noun classifiers

According to Lu (1987), Chao (1968), Li, and Thompson, there are over six hundred qualifying classifiers. While Erbaugh (1986) identified 20 as commonly used classifiers.

Furthermore, Qian Hu (1993) and Tai (1994), show some noun classification in Chinese; for example, Hu puts it this way;

1. Chinese nouns referring to general humans are preceded by the general classifier 个 in numeral noun phrases. For example; 门外有三个孩子; 弟弟有三个苹果
2. Nouns referring to animals are preceded by one of a set of classifiers indicating inhuman animacy, with 只 as the most common in the set. For example, 国家公园有三只狮子; 我家有三只狗。
3. Nouns referring to objects bearing some physical shapes are preceded by classification indicating shapes. For example, 我的卧室有一张桌子;

On the other hand, Tai (1994) revealed their four categories and pointed out some there noun and numeral pair formations.

1. Material: 匹 pǐ kǒu kǒu gēn gēn kē kē 棵 ,
2. Shape: 条 tiáo zhī zhī gēn gēn zhī zhī zhāng zhāng kuài kuài bǎ bǎ 把
3. Consistency; 根 gēn tiáo tiáo tuán tuán kuài kuài zhī zhī 支
4. Size: 头 tóu lì lì zuò zuò 座

According to the Mandarin standard book (2016:327), there are 45 frequently used classifiers in Mandarin (普通话测试实施纲要) as shown below;

Table 3. From Mandarin standard book (2016) Mandarin (普通话测试实施纲要)

S/N	Classifier	Example	S/N	Classifier	Example
1	bǎ 把	一把伞	24	kuài 快	三块石头
2	běn 本	一本书	25	lì 粒	一粒米
3	bù 部	一部电影	26	liàng 辆	一辆车
4	场 (chǎng ²)	一场雪	27	mén 门	一门课
5	chǎng 场	一场比赛	28	míng 名	一名老师
6	dào 道	一道山脉	29	miàn 面	一面镜子
7	dī 滴	一滴水	30	pán 盘	一盘录像带
8	dǐng 顶	一顶帽子	31	pǐ 匹	一匹马
9	duì 对	一对夫妻	32	piàn 片	一片树叶
10	duǒ 朵	一朵花	33	shān 扇	一扇窗户
11	fèn 份	一份报纸	34	shuāng 双	一双筷子
12	fú 幅	一幅图画	35	suǒ 所	一所学校
13	fù 副	一副眼镜	36	tái 台	一台计算机
14	gè 个	一个孩子	37	tào 套	一套衣服
15	gēn 根	一根葱	38	tiáo 条	一条裤子
16	jiā 家	一家工厂	39	tóu 头	一头牛
17	jià 架	一架飞机	40	wèi 位	一位朋友
18	jiān 间	一间房间	41	xiàng 项	一项措施
19	jiàn 件	一件衬衫	42	zhāng 张	一张扑克牌

20	jié 节	一节电池	43	zhī 只	一只狮子
21	kē 棵	一棵树	44	zhī 支	一支钢笔
22	kē 颗	一颗星	45	zuò 座	一座山
23	kǒu 口	三口人	-	-	-

Analysis of Chinese classifiers.

1. According to Qian Hun (1993), the Chinese language is a numerical classifier language. That is to say, an unbound morpheme is obligatory in a numerical nominal phrase under specifiable syntactic conditions. For example; 一只狮子, 一颗星 and so on.
2. The classifier of its own may not have any meaning. For example, 个, 棵, 部, therefore, the classifier (NCL) is used to qualify or reveal information about the noun. According to Denny and Allan (1976,1977), numerical classifiers typically provide information about physical properties such as animacy, shape, arrangement function properties such as hand tools, circles, and so on, or the social status of the referent of the head noun. For example; the classifier 棵 is used for trees, and plants for example cabbage. Hence upon seeing the classifier 棵 in the sentence, we may conclude what the noun is, e.g. plant or tree like in this case. Therefore, we may say 一颗大白菜, 一颗芒果树 等等.
3. The noun in Chinese own its will not represent plurality, therefore, the numeral classifier will be to show plural of the noun. For example, three teachers will be 三位老师 while one teacher will be 一位老师。
4. From the table and from all the Chinese sentence/phrases presented in this paper, the Chinese a numeral classifier structure is; Number+Numeral classifier +noun which may be abbreviated as “N₁+NumCL+N₂” as shown in the example, “三位老师” where N₁ (Number) =三, NumCL=位, and N₂ (Noun) =老师.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed the differences and similarities between Chinese and Chichewa noun classifiers and has made the following conclusions;

1. Though Nyanja (Chichewa) and Chinese have noun classifiers, their noun systems belong to two different groups. Thokozani Kunkeyani (2007) Nouns of Bantu languages are classified grammatically according to prefixes whether overt or null, and the concordial agreement associated with them. On the contrary, Qian Hun (1993) Chinese language is a numerical classifier language. That is to say, an unbound morpheme is obligatory in a numerical nominal phrase under specifiable syntactic conditions. For example, one teacher/a teacher will be 一位老师.
2. While in Chichewa humans and animals may share the class (use the same prefix) as in mu-nth/person and m (u)-kango for lion. On the other hand a classifier for tables (张) or a classifier for animals (只) cannot be used for people. For example; 一只人, this will be a lack of respect in the Chinese language. Furthermore, the use of noun classifiers will show how much respect is been given to a person as in the example of; 一个老师和一位老师 carrying different meanings. In the last one the teacher is been honored while in the first one, the teacher is taken to be an ordinary person. Therefore, the acquisition of Chinese classifiers by Zambian learners and the proper use of classifiers is very important in our daily life because they carry the cultural background.
3. The numeral noun formula or structure in Nyanja (Chichewa) will be as follows;
Prefix (main prefix showing class) + stem + prefix (following after the main one) +numeral.
Abbreviated as “P₁+S+P₂+N” For example “a-phunzisti a-sanu” translates as five teachers/五位老师.
4. While in Chinese a numeral classifier structure is; Number+Numeral classifier +noun which may be abbreviated as “N₁+NumCL+N₂” as shown in the example, “三位老师” where N₁ (Number) =三, NumCL=位, and N₂ (Noun) =老师. From the following structures, we have seen that the number in Nyanja (Chichewa) is at the end while in Chinese the number comes first. Therefore, it will not be surprising to see or hear Zambian learners whose mother tongue or learning Chinese language from Nyanja environment having challenges using Chinese measure words and classifiers. Hence, hope this paper may be of help to local teachers of Chinese during their teaching of Chinese classifiers to their learners.