Definite article in Southwest Mandarin Chinese
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It is generally expected that articles are absent in Sinitic languages, but it is not always the case. This paper will describe the syntactic phenomenon that in Zunyi dialect (Southwest Mandarin, Sino-Tibetan), post-nominal classifiers are used exclusively to express the definite meaning, as illustrated in example (1a). In contrast, pre-nominal classifiers are used as numeral classifiers, and do not bare definite meaning.

(1) a yifu jian
   clothes CL
   ‘the clothes’

b yi jian yifu
   one CL clothes
   ‘one piece of clothes’

On the basis of the above-mentioned contrast between the function of pre-nominal and post-nominal classifiers, I argue that the post-nominal classifier in Zunyi dialect can be analysed as definite article in the sense that it functions to express definite meaning. Although post-nominal classifiers are not obligatorily used after every noun, we cannot ignore its function of expressing definite meaning.

Generic classifier ge is used post-nominally as definite article without constraint, while specific classifiers are restricted to a small set of nouns, most of which are very frequent used in daily life, such as gangbi (‘pen’), yifu (‘clothes’), and diannao (‘computer’). Generally speaking, the more frequent the noun is, the more natural it is to allow the specific corresponding classifier being used post-nominally. However, the most frequent and most grammaticalized usage is the generic classifier. In fact, all post-nominal specific classifiers can be substituted by the generic classifier ge. This is illustrated by the following example.
Furthermore, the post-nominal classifier differentiates itself from demonstratives in that the post-nominal classifier does not show deictic meaning, although both can be used to express definite meaning. As is shown in example (3), the post-nominal classifier (3b) cannot be used in deictic context contrasting with another demonstrative, while the demonstrative can (3a).

The definite use of the post-nominal classifier in Zunyi dialect is clearly associated with the topic position. As illustrated in example (4), the nominal phrases with post-nominal classifiers as a whole are exclusively used in topic positions (4a), but not allowed in the non-topic position (4b). Since the topic position is normally associated with definite meaning, this can also be taken as a piece of evidence for the definite function of the post-nominal classifier.