On *yí* 'one item', *liǎ* 'two items', and *sā* 'three items'

Abstract: In this article, I examine the expression *yí* 'one item', as compared to the expressions *liǎ* 'two items', and *sā* 'three items' in Peking Mandarin. I discuss the character transcriptions of these expressions, give an overview of their previous treatments, and compare the current usage of *yí* with that of *liǎ* and *sā*. Based on the differences between these expressions, I conclude that while *liǎ* and *sā* are words (viz. independent carriers of the meanings 'two items' and 'three items'), the meaning 'one item' is represented in Peking Mandarin both by the expression *yí* 'one item' and by the expression *yi ge* 'an item'.

On *yí* 'one item', *liǎ* 'two items', and *sā* 'three items'

0. This article comments on the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of', e.g. *wǒmen nàr yǒu yí hòu huāyuár* 'we have a back garden there' as compared to the expressions *liǎ* 'two items', e.g. *nèi liǎ háizi shi dǎjià* 'those two children had a fight', and *sā* 'three items', e.g. *wǒ sā duō yuè méi liù niǎor* 'I haven't taken my birds out for a stroll for over three months'.

All expressions are described as attested in a corpus of spoken Peking Mandarin that I collected in 2000-2001. The corpus consists of informal and unplanned conversations with 42 native speakers of Peking Mandarin of various age groups. I have tried to record informants who were not exposed to university education and whose language, as a consequence, retained those features which distinguish it from the official educational model, Standard Mandarin. These conversations range in length from 30 minutes to one hour, they are transcribed into the Hànyǔ Pīnyīn system of transcription and are saved as computer texts. In its written form, the corpus comprises 17,844 sentences (for further details on the corpus, see Chirkova 2003).

Despite the high frequency of its use, the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' has so far been only sketchily described in reference literature (Dù 1993, Wiedenhof 1995, Zhōu 1998). This expression is an equivalent in informal speech of the phrase *yí ge* 'one item' or its weakened form *yi ge* 'an item'. In the same way, the expressions *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items' are generally considered equivalents of *liǎng ge* 'two items' and *sān ge* 'three items' respectively. In this article, I discuss the character transcriptions of these expressions (§ 1), give an overview of their previous treatments (§ 2), and compare the current usage of the expression *yí* 'one item' in the corpus with that of *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items' (§ 3).

1. *Yí*, *liǎ*, *sā*: character transcriptions

The expressions *yí* 'one item, a specimen of', *liǎ* 'two items', and *sā* 'three items' are typical for an informal style of speech, and are rarely written. Until recently these words did not have well established character renderings. For example, in Chao's article 'A note on *liǎ* (俩), *sā*, etc.' (1936), only the word *liǎ* has a written form, 俩, and the expression *sā* is given in transcription. In fact, as noted by Chao (1936: 33), the character rendering for *liǎ*, 俩, pronounced as *liǎng* and defined as 伎俩 *jìliǎng* 'skill, craft' in the *Jíyùn* 集韵 [Collected rhymes] dictionary, is not semantically related to the word *liǎ* 'two items', which only happens to be written with the same character. Since the publication of Chao's article, *sā* also acquired a written form, viz. 仨. Currently, most dictionaries of Peking Mandarin (cf. Chén et al. 1997, Xú 1996) and even some general

dictionaries of Mandarin usage (e.g. Guō 2000) list both words, *liǎ* and *sā*, with their character transcriptions. For *liǎ* see Chén et al. (1997: 226), Guō (2000: 780), Xú (1996: 246); for *sā* see Guō (2000: 1074), Xú (1996: 345).

The expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' is currently left without a written form and is usually not included either in reference books on Chinese or on Peking Mandarin. Based on the character renderings for *liǎ* and *sā*, which are combinations of the 'single standing man' radical, *dānlìrén*, with the numerals *liǎng* 'two' and *sān* 'three' respectively, Wiedenhof (1995: 66, n. 15) proposes a Chinese character spelling for the expression *yí*, viz. 乇, which consists of the 'single standing man' radical and the character for the numeral *yī* 'one'.

2. Previous treatments

Etymologically, all three expressions, *yí*, *liǎ*, and *sā*, are fusions of the numerals *yī* 'one', *liǎng* 'two', and *sān* 'three', respectively, with the measure word *ge* 'item'. All numerals from *yī* 'one' to *shí* 'ten' in Peking Mandarin can form such fusions with the measure word *ge*, as described by Chao (1936, 1968: 570-571) and more recently by Zhōu (1998: 137). Chao (1968: 571)[i] notes that such fusions are possible because the intervocalic *g* in the measure word *ge* 'item' easily weakens into a sonorant [ɣ] and then disappears, producing, for instance, such expressions as *sì'e* 'four items' instead of *sì ge* 'four items' and *wǔ'e* 'five items' for *wǔ ge* 'five items'.

Chao (1936: 37-38) offers the following phonetic details on the change of the expressions *liǎng ge* 'two items' and *sān ge* 'three items' to the forms *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items'. First, Chao notes (1936: 37, original transcriptions) that in northern and central Chinese dialects, nasal endings are 'more of the nature of the second element of a diphthong than a stable final consonant.' Therefore, the weak *-ng* in *liang*^{3} readily becomes only a nasalizing factor of the preceding vowel, resulting in the form *liã*^{3}. The *n* in *san*^{1}*-ko*^{4} 'three items', on the other hand, easily becomes velarized into *-ng*, and then reduces, as is the case with *liang*^{3}, to the nasalizing factor of the preceding vowel *a*, i.e. *sã*^{1}. Second, the intervocalic *k* [g] of the measure word *ko*^{4} 'item' weakens into [ɣ] and disappears, with the effect of *liang*^{3}*-ko*^{4} and *san*^{1}*-ko*^{4} becoming the forms *liã*^{3}*-ə* and *sã*^{1}*-ə*. Finally, Chao points out that given that neither *liã*^{3}*-ə* nor *sã*^{1}*-ə* are naturally stable sounds in the dialect, they fall into the slots of the nearest phonologically possible syllables, namely *lia*^{3} and *sa*^{1}.

Chao also states that in a similar fusion of the numeral *pa*^{1} 'eight' with the measure word *ko*^{4} 'item', the ending *-ə* is likewise easily dropped. He states (p. 37) that he had never heard a clear case of *pa*$^{1(2)}$*-ko*^{4}>

$pa^{1(2)}$-*ə* 'eight items' and that this form is realized either as the intermediate weak form $pa^{1(2)}$-*gə* or simply as a somewhat lengthened $pa(:)^1$. The reason for the instability and the eventual dropping of -*ə*, in Chao's explanation, is the aversion to a hiatus between a low and a mid vowel, as is also the case with the forms lia^3 and sa^1. In his *Grammar* (1968) he recapitulates this conclusion, pointing out (p. 571) that:

> [w]ith the low vowel *a* in *liǎng*, *sān* and *bā*, the dropping of the final consonant leaves only a lengthened *a* with a centralized vocalic ending, and since such a low diphthong fits badly the rest of the phonological system, it falls into the familiar slot of a simple *a*, thus resulting in the paradoxical form of a shorter phonological shape representing a longer grammatical form.

All other fusions of numerals with the measure word *ge* 'item', namely i^2-*ə* 'one item', $ssŭ^4$-*ə* 'four items', wu^3-*ə* 'five items', liu^4-*ə* 'six items', $ch'i^{1(2)}$-*ə* 'seven items', $chiu^3$-*ə* 'nine items', and $shih^2$-*ə* 'ten items', are reported by Chao to retain a schwa.

In his *Běijīng kóuyǔ yúfǎ* [Grammar of the Peking colloquial], Zhōu (1998: 137) gives a somewhat different list of the fusions of numerals with the measure word *ge*. Note also that Zhōu makes no reference to Chao's works. Chao's and Zhōu's lists are compared in Table 1, dissimilar forms are printed in boldface:

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The expression 'one item', claimed to have a schwa by Chao, i.e. *yí'e*, is described as having no schwa by Zhōu, viz. *yí*. The expressions 'seven items' and 'eight items' are reported by Chao to exist in the first, *qī'e* and *bā'e*, and in the second tone, *qí'e* and *bá'e*. Zhōu gives them only in the second tone, *qí'e* and *bá'e*. Moreover, the expression *bā'e/bá'e* 'eight items', which according to Chao can either retain or drop the schwa, is said to retain a schwa by Zhōu.

Generally, the numeral *yī* 'one' changes its original first tone to the second tone, *yí*, when followed by a word in the fourth tone, e.g. *yí kuài* 'one piece'. The underlying fourth tone of the measure word *ge* can likewise lead to the change of the original first tone in *yī* 'one' to the second tone, *yí*. The numerals *qī* 'seven' and *bā* 'eight' can also follow this tone sandhi, as pointed out by Chao in his *Grammar* (1968: 571). However, Chao also states that this tone sandhi is present 'in the speech of a slight majority of the speakers.' (ibid.). Hence, Chao's account of the fusions 'seven items' and 'eight items' as *qī'e/qí'e* and *bā'e/bá'e* appears to reflect this phenomenon.

In my corpus, fusions of numerals above three with the measure word *ge* are infrequent. Numerals above two, and accordingly their combinations with the measure word *ge*, occur on a much smaller scale than the numerals *yī* 'one' (or its weakened counterpart *yi* 'a') and *liǎng* 'two', as well as their collocations with *ge*.

The expression *yi ge* 'an item' is often used to introduce a new specific entity in discourse. Similar to the indefinite article *a/an* in English, it can serve to narrow down the reference of the following noun to a single member of a class. The expression *liǎng ge* 'two items' is used when speaking about couples of people and pairs of objects. Compare the frequency of occurrence of the fusions of the numerals from one to ten with the measure word *ge* in the corpus:

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Interestingly, the fusion *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' and the fusions from *sì* 'four items' to *shí* 'ten items' are realized as their corresponding numerals, which are, moreover, often lengthened. See, for instance, the expression *wǔ* 'five items' in the next example, which is realized as the lengthened numeral *wǔ* 'five'. None of the fusions in the table bears any trace of an audible schwa. The fusions *qí* 'seven items' and *bá* 'eight items' are pronounced in the second tone. Given that in both cases they are followed by words in the fourth tone, i.e. *qí bài* 'seven prayers' and *bá dà xuéyuàn* 'eight big institutes', my data leave open the possibility that some speakers of Peking Mandarin use the fusions *qī* and *bā* in the first tone, as attested by Chao.

Consider the following sentence with the forms *wǔ* 'five items' and *qí* 'seven items'. Here, the informant is telling a story about the Kāngxī Emperor (1662-1723). In this story, a Muslim minister of the Emperor tells him how many times Muslims have to pray during the day. First he uses the expression *wǔ ge bài* 'five prayers' using the measure word *ge* in front of the noun *bài* 'prayer' and then he continues with the expression *wǔ bài*, with the measure word *ge* incorporated into the fusion *wǔ* 'five items':

(1) Zhèi   ge   bài...   zhèi   wǔ   ge   bài   dōu   shi   shìjiè   shang
     this   item   prayer   this   five   item   prayer   all   be   world   up

     tǒngyī   de,   dōu   shi   nèi   ge   diǎr.   Shuō   yǒu   de
     unify   SUB   all   be   that   item   place   speak   exist   SUB

     shí   shi   wǔ   bài,   yǒu   de   shíhou   shi   qí   bài,
     time   be   five.item   prayer   exist   SUB   time   be   seven.item   prayer

     shuō   yǒu   de   shíhour   jiu   shi   wǒ   yīnwei   máng,   méi
     speak   exist   SUB   time   just   be   1S   because   busy   not.exist

gōngfur   lǐbài,   dàn   wó   gěi   ta   bǔshang.

free.time   pray   but   1S   give   3   make.up.for

'This prayer... these five prayers are the same in the whole world, all of them take place there. So he said, sometimes I pray five times and sometimes seven times, and he also said, sometimes I don't have time to pray because I am busy, but I will make up for it.'

As shown in Table 2, the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' is used as often as the expression *liǎ* 'two items' in the corpus. Despite its high frequency in the spoken language, this form is studied much less than the expressions *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items'. *Yí* has so far been attested only by Dù (1993: 142), Wiedenhof (1995: 65-66), and Zhōu (1998: 137). Dù, who first directed attention to this usage, described the expression *yí* as appearing invariably in the second tone. Further, he identified it with the numeral 一 *yī/yi* 'one'. Thus, he reported that the numeral *yī* can be directly followed by a nominal phrase (which construction he names the '*yí* + noun' pattern, '一+名' 格式 '*yí* + *míng*' *géshì*) without an intervening measure word. In reality, the invariable appearance of the expression *yí* in the second tone suggests that this expression is a fusion of the numeral *yī/yi* 'one/a' and the measure word *ge*, the underlying fourth tone of which word, *gè*, has led to the second tone of *yí*, as noted by Wiedenhof (1995: 66). Hence, the expression *yí*, pronounced clearly without a schwa by my informants, is a fusion of the numeral *yī/yi* and the measure word *ge* rather than the numeral *yī/yi* 'one/a' occurring with a nominal phrase without a measure word. In the corpus, this expression appears in the second tone, *yí*, and in the neutral tone, *yi*, in rapid speech. I consider all instances of the use of *yí* or *yi* followed by a nominal expression without an intervening measure word in the corpus as examples of such a fusion.

As already noted, of all fusions of a numeral with the measure word *ge*, only the forms *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items' have been well documented. Chao, who comments on them in his article 'A note on *liǎ* (俩), *sā*, etc.' (1936) and in his *Grammar* (1968), outlines the limitations of their use (1936: 34-36, 1968: 570-571). He also addresses the common misconception that the expression *liǎ* 'two items' written with the 'single standing man' radical, 俩, has a special reference to persons, whereas in fact it can be used both for persons and things (1936: 33, 1968: 570). He concludes (1936: 36) that '*liǎ* and *sā* are the equivalent, in informal style, of *liǎng* and *sā*, respectively, plus a numerary adjunct for individual objects or persons.' He notes that other fusions of numerals with *ge* are possible, but does not comment on them in detail.

Let us now proceed to an overview of the usage of the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' in the corpus as compared to that of *liǎ* and *sā*. The two following features of fusions of numerals with the measure word *ge* have to be borne in mind for the comparison. First, in Mandarin, a combination of a numeral with a measure word can serve as a nominal or an attributive phrase. For instance, in the next sentence, the expression *liǎng ge* 'the two of them, both of them' serves as a nominal phrase. In this example, the informant is speaking about her two sisters who did not have a chance to study in their youth.

(2) Liǎng ge mìng bú tài hǎo de.

   two item fate not too good SUB

'For both of them, life was tough.'

The term attributive phrase refers to words or expressions that serve to modify nominal heads. Consider example (3), in which the expression *sān ge* 'three items' is used as an attributive and modifies the noun *qí* 'banner'. The informant is speaking about the administrative system of the Eight Banners, *Bā Qí zhìdù* 八旗制度, during the Qīng dynasty (1644-1911):

(3) Zhèi sān ge qí   shi huángdì qīnzì   zhángguǎn.

   this three item banner be emperor personally administer

'These three banners were administered personally by the Emperor.'

Given that the fusions *yí* 'one item, a specimen of', *liǎ* 'two items', and *sā* 'three items' are equivalents of their formal counterparts *yí ge* 'one item' or *yi ge* 'an item', *liǎng ge* 'two items', and *sān ge* 'three items', these fusions can likewise serve as nominal and attributive phrases. Consider, for instance, the following examples, in which the expression *liǎ* 'two items' serves as a nominal, sentence (4), and as an attributive phrase, sentence (5).

(4) Nǐ...   nǐmen   liǎ   suìshu   kěnéng   dōu   chàbuduō   gǎnshang

    2S   2P   two.item   age   possible   all   similar   catch.up.up

    nèi   shíjiān   le.

    that   time   PF

'You… you two should be of almost the same age, so you witnessed these happenings.'

In example (5), the informant is speaking about the time when Peking was occupied by the Japanese. He is recalling that then one could exchange clothes for eggs from Japanese. Note that the word *dàbáiguǒ* is the Chinese approximation of the Japanese word *tamago* 卵 'egg':

(5) Shuō,   tā   nàr   yǒu   yīshang   a,   ná   liǎ   jīdàn,   dàbáiguǒ,

    speak   3   there   exist   clothes   ah   take   two.item   egg   *tamago*

    huàn   liǎ   yīshang,   huàn   diǎr   tā   de   dōngxi.

    exchange   two.item   clothes   exchange   a.little   3   SUB   thing

'He said, they have clothes there, take two eggs, *tamago*, to exchange for two items of clothing, to exchange for a little bit of their stuff.'

Another feature of the fusions of numerals with the measure word *ge* important for this analysis is that such fusions are weakened forms of their respective equivalents. As noted by Chao (1968: 567), a stressed combination of the numeral *yī* and a measure word, in this case, *yí ge*, differs from an unstressed combination of *yi* with a measure word, *yi ge*, somewhat as English *one* differs from *a* and *an*, which are also derived from a weakened *one*. Likewise the stressed form of *liǎng* 'two' followed by a measure word, *liǎng ge* in this case, means '(exactly) two', while the weakened form *liang* followed by a measure word in its full or the neutral tone means 'a couple of, a few' (Chao 1968: 570). Chao also states that the weakened form of *yi* 'a' followed by a measure word and the weakened form of *liang* 'two, a couple' followed by a measure word occur only after

verbs. In the next section, I will demonstrate that the expression *sā* 'three items' is often used as a weakened form of *sān ge* '(exactly) three'.

3. *Yí* 'one item' as compared to *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items'

3.1. The first notable feature of *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' as compared to the expression *liǎ* 'two items' and *sā* 'three items', is that while *yí ge* or *yi ge* occur much more often than their informal counterpart *yí*, the expressions *liǎng ge* and *sān ge* occur less frequently than their informal equivalents *liǎ* and *sā*. Consider the following table:

<div align="center">*INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE*</div>

Note that the expression *sā* 'three items' is not frequently used in the corpus and occurs only in ten out of a total of 52 recording sessions. I counted the number of occurrences of *sān ge* 'three items' only in those 10 sessions which have the form *sā*. The expressions *yí* 'one item', *yí ge/yi ge* 'one item'/'an item', and *liǎ* 'two items' and *liǎng ge* 'two items' have been calculated in all 52 sessions.

The high frequency of *yí ge* and *yi ge* in the corpus reflects the wide range of their use. The stressed expression *yí ge* 'one item' normally appears as a nominal phrase and in stressed negation *yí ge (yě/dōu) méi yǒu* 'there is not a single one'. The weakened form *yi ge* 'an item' is usually used attributively.

The expression *yí* can replace both the stressed *yí ge* and the unstressed *yi ge*, as examples (6) through (8) show. In the next sentence, in which the expression *yí* 'one item' is used as a nominal phrase, the informant is speaking about two temples in the outskirts of Peking:

(6) Yí   jiào   Tánzhèsì,   yí   ge   jiào   Jiètáisì.
     one.item call   *Tánzhè*.temple   one   item   call   *Jiètái*.temple

'One is called Tánzhè Temple, and the other is called Jiètái Temple.'

In example (7), the expression *yí* is used in the negation *méi yǒu yí ge* 'there is not a single one'. The informant is answering my question whether Manchu women had the habit of foot-binding.

(7) Bù,   suóyǒu   de,   nǐ   kàn   nèi   ge…   duì,   tāmen   qí   mǎ
     not   all   SUB   2S   see   that item right   3P   ride   horse

gēn	zhe	zhàngfu	qù	yóuliè,	qù...	qù...	qù	dǎzhàng	shéme
follow	DUR	husband	go	hunt	go	go	go	fight	what

de,	suóyǐ	suóyǒu	de	Mǎnzúrén,	Qírén	jiu
SUB	therefore	all	SUB	Manchu.person	banner.person	just

děngyú	shi	méi	yǒu	yí	ge	qí	mǎ	de...	méi	yǒu...
be.equal	be	not.exist	exist	one	item	ride	horse	SUB	not.exist	exist

bú	shi,	shéme	méi	yǒu	yí	qí	mǎ	de...	méi
not	be	what	not.exist	exist	one.item	ride	horse	SUB	not.exist

yǒu	yí	ge	guó	jiǎo	de,	méi	yǒu.
exist	one	item	bind	feet	SUB	not.exist	exist

'No, all... you see eh... right, they went on horses to hunt with their husbands, to... to... to fight and to do other stuff, therefore none of the Manchus, that's to say none of the Banner people rode horses... rode..., no, what am I saying, had her feet bound, none of them.'

In the next example, the expression *yí* substitutes the stressed *yí ge* in the vivid reduplication *yí ge dòng yí dòng de* meaning 'one trench after the other'. The informant is recalling that at some point during the time of the Kuomintang (1911-1949), the city of Peking was surrounded by trenches.

(8)	Jiu	Guómíndǎng	de	shíhour,	jìng	shi	gěi	wā	de	ya	yí
	just	*Kuomintang*	SUB	time	all	be	give	dig	SUB	PH	one

ge	dòng	yí	dòng	de,	shi	a,	cáng	dāng	bīng	de	shǐ.
item	hole	one.item	hole	SUB	be	ah	hide	serve.as	soldier	SUB	use

'So, at the time of the Kuomintang, they were digging all over trench after trench, right?, to serve as trenches for soldiers.'

Such instances where the expression *yí* substitutes the stressed *yí ge* 'one item' are relatively rare in the corpus. The use of *yí/yi* instead of the weakened *yi ge* 'an item' as an attributive after verbs, on the other hand, is far more frequent. Note also that Dù (1993) mentions only attributive usages of the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of'. In most cases in the corpus, informants tend to use *yi ge* 'an item' on the first mention of a person or thing talked about and to use the form *yí/yi* on the second mention of this person or thing. Consider the following examples:

(9) Dào   niánye   zǎi   yí   ge   zhū.   Zǎi   yí   zhū
     arrive   year.night slaughter one   item   pig   slaughter one.item   pig

     hǎohāor   de   chī   diǎr.
     good.good   SUB   eat   a.little

'On the New Year's eve, it was customary to slaughter one pig. They slaughtered a pig to eat one's fill for once.'

(10) Géi   nǐ   shuō   yí   ge   gùshi   ba,   shuō   yí   gùshi   bu   shuō   le,
      give   2S   speak   one   item story   SUG   speak   one.item   story   not   speak   PF

      tài   lèi   le.
      too   be.tired   PF

'I'll tell you a story, tell a story and that will be it, I'm too tired.'

Opposite examples, namely the use of the expression *yí/yi* 'one item'/'an item' on the first mention of a person or thing and the use of the expression *yi ge* 'an item' on the second mention of this person and thing, are also attested in the corpus, but they are far less frequent.

3.2. As discussed in the preceding sections, *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' occurs in the corpus mostly as an attributive expression. By comparison, the expressions *liǎ* and *sā* are used as nominal phrases much more often than *yí*. Consider the following table:

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The high frequency of the use of *liǎ* 'two items' as a nominal phrase is due to its frequent occurrence in the meaning 'the two/both [of us, you, them]', e.g. *nǐmen liǎ* 'you two' in example (4).

It is interesting that the addition of *liǎ* is equally possible after singular and plural (with 们 *men*) forms of personal pronouns. For instance, in the following sentence, the informant uses the expression *liǎ* with the third person pronoun *tā*, which can be used in Peking Mandarin both when referring to a singular person or object or to numerous persons or objects, and with the singular second person pronoun *nǐ*. In this example, the informant is speaking about two young Muslims who killed each other in a fight.

(11) Tā   liǎ   mái   yíkuàr   le,   shuō   ní   liǎ   āi   zhe   ba.

      3   two.item   bury   together   PF   speak 2S   two.item   be.near.to DUR   SUG

'The two of them were buried together, as people said: "Rest side by side, the two of you." '

An example of the use of *liǎ* 'two items' with the plural second person pronoun *nǐmen* is given in sentence (4).

3.3. While all informants use *yí ge* 'one item', its weakened form *yi ge* 'an item' and the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' interchangeably (with the exception of a few young informants who use only the expressions *yí ge* and *yi ge* and do not use the expression *yí*), in the case of *liǎ* and *sā*, informants usually chose to use either these forms exclusively, or their formal equivalents *liǎng ge* and *sān ge* exclusively. In other words, when an informant uses the expression *liǎ* 'two items' or *sā* 'three items', he would not use the expression *liǎng ge* 'two items' or *sān ge* 'three items' respectively. For instance, one of my informants (58 years old) uses mainly the

expression *liǎ* 'two items'. In the six sessions that I recorded with this informant, he used *liǎ* 42 times and *liǎng ge* 2 times.

As is also the case with *yi ge* versus *yí* (§ 3.1), when *sā* 'three items' is used together with *sān ge* 'three items', the expression *sān ge* often appears on the first mention of the thing or person talked about and the expression *sā* appears on further mentions of this thing or person. This argues that in those cases where the expression *sā* 'three items' is used interchangeably with the expression *sān ge* 'three items', *sā* is used as a weakened form of *sān ge* '(exactly) three items'.

The expression *sā* is used in a total of 10 sessions. In 6 sessions, the informants use the expression *sā*, and do not use the expression *sān ge*. In two sessions, conversations between several informants are recorded, and while some speakers use *sā*, other speakers prefer to use *sān ge*. In the remaining two sessions, in which one informant uses the expressions *sā* 'three items' and *sān ge* 'three items' interchangeably, *sān ge* is used on the first mention of a person or think talked about, and *sā* on further mentions of this person or thing. Consider the following sentence, in which the informant is speaking here about traditional burials in old Peking. He notes that in order for a certain ritual to be performed, the deceased had to have three sons: *bìxū déi yǒu sān ge érzi* 'he must have three sons'. Four sentences later, still speaking about the same ritual, he uses the form *sā* instead of the form *sān ge*:

(12) Zhè   děngyú   sā   érzi   cái   dádào   zhèi   tiáojiàn.
      this   be.equal three.item   son   only   reach.arrive   this   condition

'This means that only with three sons you can satisfy this requirement.'

The same tendency, viz. to use fusions of numerals with *ge* as weakened forms of actual combinations of numerals with the measure word *ge* is equally characteristic to all other fusions. Consider, for instance, the use of the expression *wǔ* 'five items' after the expression *wǔ ge* in example (1).

3.4. In his *Grammar* (1968: 570), Chao states that there is a common misconception that the word *liǎ*, written with the 'single standing man' radical, 俩, has special reference to persons, even though *liǎ* is grammatically equivalent to its counterpart *liǎng ge*, and can be used both for persons and for things. In my corpus, *yí*, *liǎ*, and *sā* confirm to this conclusion and can indeed be used both for animate and inanimate objects, for instance, *yí nǚ*

de 'a woman' versus *yí dà tīng* 'a big hall', *liǎ shénxiān* 'two immortals' versus *liǎ yuè* 'two months', *sā érzi* 'three sons' versus *sā dìr* 'three places'. However, my informants tend to use the expressions *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' and *sā* 'three items' mainly for inanimate objects, whereas the expression *liǎ* 'two items' is used mostly when referring to people (119 instances of 181 occurrences of *liǎ*), which fact argues for a shift in the use of this form from Chao's times.

4. Conclusion

The expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' in Peking Mandarin is realized as the numeral *yī* 'one' in the second, *yí,* or in the neutral tone, *yi*, without any audible schwa. Other fusions of numerals with the measure word *ge* are likewise realized in the corpus as their corresponding numerals, which are often lengthened. Therefore, all of such fusions exemplify the phenomenon of a 'shorter phonological shape standing for a longer grammatical form.'

A possible explanation of the differences between the form *yí* and the forms *liǎ* and *sā* outlined in the preceding sections lies along the lines of Chao's analysis of the form $pa^{1(2)}$-·a 'eight items'. I propose that, given the phonetic instability of the form *yí'e* 'one item' (this form is not a naturally stable sound in Peking Mandarin and falls into the slot of *yí*), the expression 'one item, a specimen of' is at times realized as *yí* (mostly as an attributive phrase) and at times as *yi ge* (both as a nominal and as an attributive phrase). The expressions *yí* and *yi ge* serve as variants of each other in this meaning, i.e. 'one item, a specimen of'. This analysis accounts for the disproportions of the use of *yí* as compared to that of *yí ge* and *yi ge*.

Moreover, as evident from the preference of informants to use either the expressions *liǎng ge* and *sān ge* or the forms *liǎ* and *sā*, the latter are words on their own, which is to say that they are independent carriers of the meanings 'two items' and 'three items' respectively. The meaning 'one item', on the other hand, is represented by two variants, the expression *yí* 'one item, a specimen of' and by the expression *yi ge* 'an item'.

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Endnotes

[i] In quotations from Chao (1936, 1968), the original transcriptions have as a rule been converted into Hànyǔ Pīnyīn. Chao's transcriptions from his (1936) work have been retained in § 2 as more adequately reflecting the phonetic details of the change from the expression *liǎng ge* 'two items' to the expression *liǎ* 'two items' and from the expression *sān ge* 'three items' to the expression *sā* 'three items'.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person personal pronouns
DUR	durative aspect expressed by the particle *zhe*
P	plural
PF	perfective aspect expressed by the particle *le*
PH	pause for the hearer expressed by the particle *a* or its variant *ya*
S	singular
SUB	subordination expressed by the particle *de*
SUG	suggestion expressed by the particle *ba*

Table 1—Chao's (1936, 1968) and Zhōu's (1998) lists of fusions of numerals with *ge*

	Chao (1936, 1968)	Zhōu (1998)
'one item'	***yí'e***	***yí***
'two items'	*liǎ*	*liǎ*
'three items'	*sā*	*sā*
'four items'	*sì'e*	***sè****/sì'e*
'five items'	*wǔ'e*	*wǔ'e*
'six items'	*liù'e*	*liù'e*
'seven items'	***qī'e/qí'e***	***qí'e***
'eight items'	***bā'e/bá'e* or *bā***	***bá'e***
'nine items'	*jiǔ'e*	*jiǔ'e*
'ten items'	*shí'e*	*shí'e*

Table 2—Frequency of fusions of numerals from one to ten with the measure word *ge*

Fusion	Total in the corpus
yí 'one item'	180
liǎ 'two items'	181
sā 'three items'	25
sì 'four items'	4
wǔ 'five items'	1
liù 'six items'	0
qí 'seven items'	1
bá 'eight items'	1
jiǔ 'nine items'	2
shí 'ten times'	5

Table 3—Number of occurrences of *yí* versus *yí ge*, *liǎ* versus *liǎng ge*, and *sā* versus *sān ge*

	total
yí 'one item, a specimen of'	180
yí ge/yi ge 'one item'/'an item'	1112
liǎ 'two items'	181
liǎng ge 'two items'	91
sā 'three items'	25
sān ge 'three items'	14

Table 4—Frequency of *yí*, *liă*, and *sā* as nominal phrases

	yí 'one item'	*liă* 'two items'	*sā* 'three items'
Number of occurrences as nominal phrases	4	79	5
Total in the corpus	180	181	25