# From numeral classifier to definiteness marker: The versatile determiner *və¹³* in Zauzou

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Tibeto-Burman is a family that features the existence of numeral classifiers, which serve a wide range of functions in noun phrases (Bisang 1999; Vittrant & Tang 2021; Guo & Li 2021). Languages in this family may employ independent grammatical devices to encode nominal plurality (Dryer 2013; Haspelmath 2013) and/or (in)definiteness (Gerner 2003). Many Tibeto-Burman languages also employ versatile determiners that have functions of numeral classifiers, plural quantifiers, and (in)definiteness markers (LaPolla & Huang 2008; Zhang 2013; Xu 1998; Bai & Xu 2012; Guillaume 2021). This article presents a frequently used versatile determiner *və¹³* in the Ngwi language Zauzou, a numeral classifier language (Li 2020). It aims to provide a comprehensive description of *və¹³* to understand the position of this special classifier in the determiner system of Zauzou by examining syntactic and semantic properties of *və¹³* in a number of noun phrases and comparing *və¹³* with ordinary classifiers and the plural quantifier *mõ⁵³*. All of the data are collected from systematic fieldwork in the Tu'e area in Yunnan, China.

The determiner *və¹³* is a numeral classifier that is also used as a definiteness marker. As a classifier, *və¹³* is restrictively used in cardinal constructions to classify nouns without a conventional classifier, as shown in (1). The co-occurrence of *və¹³* and a cardinal number larger than 'one' is very rare in naturalistic speech.

(1) *tɕʰi⁵⁵tʰã⁵⁵    nœ⁵³    və¹³*
     heel          two      DET:versatile
     'Two heels'

*və¹³* is primarily a post-nominal definiteness marker, which may follow a mass or count noun, as demonstrated in (2) and (3). When modifying count nouns, *və¹³* is compatible with both singular and plural references.

(2) *tuɯ⁵⁵    ɕyi³¹    və¹³              tʰi³³    tʰuɯ⁵³    tõ⁵⁵*
     3        blood    DET:versatile     bleed    exit       DUR
     'Her blood was coming out.'
     (Dangerous cases as a doctor)

(3) a. *la⁵³yi³¹    və¹³              tuɯ⁵⁵       wɔ¹³    tõ³³*        [SG]
         swing      DET:versatile     3           play    PROG
         '(He) is playing the swing.'
         (CAL-Ouwenhua-Discourse)
     b. *pe³³tsɿ³³    və¹³              tɕĩ¹³      ʔɛ³¹    tɕĩ¹³*       [PL]
         cup         DET:versatile     frighten   also    frighten
         '(He) is frightened and makes all of the cups fall over.'
         (CAL-OuXizhen-discourse)

In addition to numeral classifier and definiteness marker, *və¹³* can follow a classifier to convey a partitive meaning, yielding the "double determiner construction" (i.e. [N CL *və¹³*]). It also occurs in relative constructions and clause complementation for relationalization. Finally, it appears in the compound discourse cohesive particle *ja¹³-və¹³* to connect two temporally related clauses.

Zauzou is a typical numeral classifier language that also exhibits "morphosemantic plural marking" (Tang & Her 2019). By comparing *və¹³* with classifiers and plural quantifiers in Zauzou, these three classes of determiners are functionally converged in marking definiteness of noun phrases but are in complementary distribution in the morphosyntactic contexts of [N+DEM+_], [N+GEN+_], and [RC+(DEM)+_]. Classifiers mark definite singulars, plural quantifiers mark definite plurals, and *və¹³* only marks definiteness and is underspecified in number. The Zauzou *və¹³* and similar determiners in other TB languages represent an understudied semantic subclass of classifiers, which classify nouns without a conventional classifier and are presumably more grammaticalized than other classifiers.

**Keywords:** numeral classifier, number, definiteness, plurality, mass noun

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